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STORIES BY...
ROBERT E. HOWARD!
HUGH B. CAVE!
CARL JACOBI!
MANLY WADE WELLMAN!
T.E.D. KLEIN!

# PULP MAGAZINE

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# EDITORIAL

Many fans of the pulps and their authors seem to begin as adherents of one particular genre, title, character, or writer, and then become interested in the whole magical pulp era and all its products. It is for the delectation of such all-purpose pulpsters that his first (and only) issue of Pulp Magazine is offered. A word now about the stories.

T. E. D. Klein did not write for the pulps; he isn't old enough. But his "They Don't Write 'em Like This Anymore," a TV treatment offered but turned down by both CBS's Twilight Zone and NBC's Amazing Stories, perfectly sums up what we are trying to do in the magazine, as you will see.

Robert E. Howard's "The Stones of Destiny" is one of those silly "confession" pieces he bragged to Novalyne Price that he'd tossed off for a few extra bucks, though this one seems never to have been printed before now. It has been lost in the shuffle for a while, misclassified as a boxing story, so denominated in Joe Marek's 1982 history and our own recent "Collector's Checklist of Howard's Fiction" (Cromlech #3). For more of this sort of stuff, see our Lurid Confessions #1.

"Light in the Jungle" is Carl Jacobi's 1949 rewrite of an earlier version, "Borneo Lamp," unsuccessfully submitted to Doc Savage in 1939. Alas, Short Stories bounced it, too, in 1950. But Jacobi's fans will be glad to see it at last!

Hugh B. Cave must surely rank in the top tier of prolific pulpsters, given his short story total around one thousand. Here is a brand new tale hot off his typewriter, "Anti," originally aimed at Violent Tales, but bequeathed to us when that mag folded.

Jacobi is back with "Helograph," a story that just could not find a welcome back in 1937 when all within that single year, it was thumbed-down by Dime Adventure, Short Stories, Top-Notch, Thrilling Adventure, South Sea Stories, Complete Stories, Argosy, Doc Savage, and All-Star Adventure Magazine! Now that might imply this tale is not much good, but you know the proverbial thick-headedness of us editors! We think, clear-headedly for a change, that you'll enjoy it!

Our single reprint, Robert Bloch's "The Curse of the House," might as well be a new story, as you won't find it in any of Bloch's short story collections. Few Bloch stories can make that claim! This one comes from the pages of Strange Stories, February 1939.

Manly Wade Wellman's "Murder in Silhouette" was written in 1933 and unsuccessfully submitted to Street & Smith's Detective Story, Detective, Thrilling Detective, Underworld, and others. He decided to rewrite it as a "spicy" detective yarn, but that version did not appear until 1986 in our own Risque Stories #4. Here is the straight version.

So there you have them, stories that did, should have, or would have appeared in the pulps!

Robert M. Price
Editor

# "THEY DON'T WRITE 'EM LIKE THIS ANYMORE"

A TV Treatment in Two Versions

by T. E. D. Klein

Version One

A bleak day in early spring; evening. The grey city block is dominated by an expensive modern high-rise. Inside its plush elevator stands Martin Stone, tired, greying, his face half hidden behind the financial column of a newspaper. He is returning home from a hard day at the office; he wears a trenchcoat and, in his free hand, clutches a sleek leather briefcase.

The door slides open. Stone lets himself into an apartment at the end of the hall. It's posh, well-furnished, a bit impersonal. So is the peck on the cheek that Stone gives his wife, who greets him in the living room. She's middle-aged, attractive, somewhat distant. Perhaps a photo or two may hint of a grown-up daughter somewhere--grandchildren, even--but there's no sign of children in this sterile apartment. Somewhere there's an old-fashioned picture of Stone's Aunt Marian, dead these twenty years.

Stone looks through the pile of mail waiting for him on the coffee table: Time, Fortune, Vanity Fair, a few bills, some glossy corporate reports . . . and then his brow furrows. "What's this?"

"I don't know, dear--it just came in the mail. Some kind of promotion, maybe."

It's a large, colorful pulp magazine, Science Marvel Tales emblazoned on the front--and it's in spanking new condition. On its cover, a tentacled creature reaches for a partially-clad blonde; behind them, a futuristic city glows beneath the stars.

"April 1939," he says wonderingly, reading it off the cover. "Obviously a reprint." He flips through the pages. "Hmm, good job, too! A perfect facsimile." Holding the issue to his nose, he closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, and smiles like a man smelling a food he hasn't tasted for years. "Mmm . . . Smells just like they used to, that wonderful pulp smell!" He stares at the cover, shakes his head. "God, I haven't seen one of these since . . . I must have been twelve! Sure, that's right--I remember using my birthday money to send away for a subscription."

The magazine's arrival stirs a flood of memories, which he recounts to his wife. Perhaps we see some of them in flashback: memories of a smalltown boyhood during the Depression, when Stone lived with his stern and pious Aunt Marian. He remembers waiting for the postman each month, snatching the newly arrived issues of Science Marvel Tales out of the mailbox before his aunt saw them, sneaking into the house with them concealed beneath his jacket, and reading them under the covers at night with a flashlight. (He kept a secret hoard of back issues behind the Sunday school texts on his bookshelf.) The magazine's illustrations--especially the covers--were so enticingly lurid, worthy of a Margaret Brundage. His aunt would never understand . . .

He remembers the day he got to the mailbox too late--and the look on his aunt's face as she eyed a particularly salacious-looking cover. She was greatly put out: not

furious, perhaps, but troubled. The cover, the interior artwork, the very titles of the stories--"Spawn of the Vampire Queen," "White Slavers from the Stars"--convinced her that the magazines were the sort of trash no twelve-year-old should read. She wouldn't believe his protestations that the stories themselves were wonderful . . .

"I remember she wrote to the publishers and had the subscription terminated," says Stone.

"That wasn't very nice of her," says the wife. "After all, it was your birthday money."

Stone nods, trying to remember. "I know," he says. "It's hard to picture Aunt Marian doing a thing like that. It wasn't like her. She was strict, but she was fair."

(Perhaps he also recalls her finding the issues hidden behind the bookshelf. "She made me give my precious collection to the Salvation Army," he'd say, "but she bought me a set of Dickens to make up for it.")

"At any rate," he says, flipping through the pages, "she was dead wrong about this--it all seems pretty innocent now." Smiling, he scans one of the stories and begins to read a passage out loud to his wife. Distracted by some household matter, she barely listens as he savors the fantastic imagery and rather florid prose.

At last she interrupts: "Who do you suppose sent it to you?"

Stone looks up, puzzled, and peers at the address label on the cover. "I can't imagine."

"Maybe they still have your name on the mailing list."

Stone smiles. "Ha!! Not likely! The magazine folded back in the forties, just like the rest of 'em, thanks to the wartime paper shortage --it was probably on its last legs by then anyway. Besides, I doubt they could have traced me here. I'm a long way from Rutherford's Corners now."

A touch of sadness; he's remembering how family fortunes had changed with the Depression. They'd had to move; the boy, growing up too fast, hungry for money, had forgotten things like vampire queens and starships.

He gazes down at the magazine. "In fact, this must have been one of their last issues."

The pages before him reveal a magnificent 1930s illustration nearly crowding out the text, a lush pen-and-ink spread of a space explorer coming upon a beautiful woman on a world with two suns. He reads a few lines to himself, and sighs with satisfaction. "Wow! They don't write 'em like this anymore!"

Eagerly he settles down to read.

In the coming months, the issues continue to arrive, each cover stranger and more enthralling than the last. May '39, June '39, July '39, on into the fall -- representatives of another age, yet every issue crisp and new as if printed that very morning.

Late fall; the weather has turned colder. Stone and his wife, laden with luggage, tote bags, etc., from some weekend excursion, stop in the mailroom off the lobby to pick up the weekend's mail.

Amid the bills and circulars he finds a new issue of Science Marvel Tales--October '39. He hurries into the elevator with all the pleasure of a schoolboy. "I haven't seen you smile like that in years!" his wife sniffs.

A small white piece of paper flutters to the elevator floor; it had been stuck inside the magazine. It proves to be a note, written in the jumpy, smudged lettering of an old manual typewriter, on stationery bearing an ornate old-style logo: "Uncanny Productions--Publishers of Science Marvel Tales."

"Dear Sir," it says, "We hope you have enjoyed our publication, and are sorry for the interruption in your original one-year subscrip-

tion, which will terminate with this issue." It's signed, "M. C. O'Dowd, Circulation Manager."

"Impossible," Stone mutters. "After half a century . . ."

"What do you mean?" asks his wife.

"They're claiming it's the subscription I had when I was twelve! The one Aunt Marian canceled." He laughs. "Somebody's pulling my leg."

The next day, at the office--an imposing modern workplace that's at once plush yet high-tech--someone notices the magazine on Stone's desk and ribs him: "What's this? Are you reliving your boyhood?"

Embarrassed, Stone puts the magazine away, like a schoolboy caught reading a comic in class. But later, noticing it in his desk drawer, he calls his secretary in. "There's an outfit in Chicago I want you to check on for me." He reads her the name from the front of the issue. "Uncanny Productions . . ."

"What's that?" asks the secretary. "A video house?"

"No, it's a publishing company. It's in something called 'The Blake Building,' at--" He reads her an address in Chicago.

"Are we thinking of buying it?"

"No, no. Just find out if it still exists."

She reports back to him: there's no listing for it. He's disappointed. "Oh, well, I didn't think there would be," he says. "I'm sure even the address doesn't exist anymore."

"I wouldn't know," she says, "but you could check on it yourself. You're scheduled to fly out there on Thursday."

Thursday finds him in Chicago. Traveling from his hotel to a corporate meeting, he asks the cab driver to make a detour to the address he'd read in the magazine. "You sure you want to go over there, mister?" the driver asks dubiously. "It's a bit out of the way. That whole area's due to be demolished. It's like a ghost town these days."

"Yes, let's go. I want to see for myself."

The street is empty, but the tiny six-story "Blake Building" is still standing, its bricks black with age. "I hear they're tearin' it down in a week or two," says the driver. He waits as Stone peers inside the darkened entranceway. The building appears to be abandoned, but a directory on the wall still bears the names of various small-time establishments of a bygone age: a dry-goods firm, a hatmaker, "radio repair," "voice lessons." The sixth floor lists Uncanny Productions. It's a walkup. Grimacing, Stone heads for the stairs.

Six flights later he emerges from the shadows, panting heavily, and comes upon the offices of Science Marvel Tales. They're a fantasy of Weird Tales in the days of Farnsworth Wright: small, shabby, quaint--a total contrast to Stone's super-smooth modern office. Dusty framed paintings from Science Marvel covers adorn the walls. A thin, ragged-looking writer sits near the entrance, nervously cradling his manuscript. A secretary in high-necked 1930s garb is pecking at an ancient black manual typewriter that looks like an antique.

She looks up. "May I help you, sir?" Stone gives his name and asks to talk to Mr. O'Dowd. He notices, through a doorway, an editor in bow-tie and spectacles poring through a tottering pile of manuscripts.

O'Dowd appears, young, sandy-haired, and harried-looking. "Trouble with your subscription, Mr. Stone?" There is something curiously knowing in his eyes.

"No, no trouble at all," says Stone, then smiles--"aside from a short delay."

O'Dowd regards him gravely. "Well," he says, "if I recall correctly, we had some correspondence on this matter from

a Miss Marian Stone."

"You're absolutely right," says Stone, astonished. "You folks certainly have long memories! Marian Stone was my aunt. She's the one who canceled my subscription."

"I beg your pardon, sir," says O'Dowd. "Not canceled Interrupted. You'd paid for that subscription in good faith--with your own money, if I'm not mistaken--but your aunt felt you were a little too young for it. So she asked us to hold the remainder of your subscription 'pending further notification,' as she put it . . . And that accounts for the delay."

"But who notified you to start it again?"

"She did."

"Aunt Marian? When?"

"Why, it was, let's see . . . around six or seven months ago."

"Impossible!" cries Stone.

"I saw her face to face, Mr. Stone. She was right here in this office."

"She's been dead for nearly twenty years!"

"That may very well be, sir," says O'Dowd, "but she was here this spring, standing right where you are now . . . and she told me she thought it was time to reinstate your subscription. She said you were finally old enough to appreciate it." He stares at Stone intently. "I know it's run out now . . . but any time you want to, you can renew. Whenever you decide--"

"I don't want to renew," snaps Stone, his head suddenly aching. "I want an explanation! I want--"

"Remember, Mr. Stone," the other interrupts, "it's never too late for a renewal. It's just a matter of wanting it badly enough." He glances at his watch. "And now, if you'll excuse me . . ." He turns to a young man who has just hurried through the door carrying a large artist's portfolio. "Chief!" O'Dowd calls, and the editor emerges from his office. Ignoring Stone, the two examine the young man's illustration, a shimmering pen-and-ink spread similar to the one Stone had savored in the magazine, depicting spaceships, monsters, a wide-eyed young woman, a futuristic cityscape, a sky festooned with stars.

Dazed, his head swirling with the strange conversation and the images from the picture, Stone sinks weakly into one of the shabby leather chairs.

"Sir?" the artist asks. "Sir? Can I give you a hand down the stairs?"

Stone looks up, confused. "What? Oh . . . Oh, yes. Thanks." Half staggering, he allows himself to be led toward the stairway. The artist, an earnest young man, is saying, "It's so encouraging to find my work appreciated by someone like yourself, someone who's old enough to know how badly we need beauty in the world. That's what makes working for Uncanny Productions so special--the sense of reaching people, people of all ages, from all walks of life. There are a lot of magazines on the stands, but there's nothing quite like Science Marvel Tales."

Stone finds himself back in the cab. The driver turns to him. "Where to, mister?"

"Oh, uh . . . back to my hotel."

"Good. Glad to get outa here. These old ruins give me the creeps!"

Dissolve to December: a snowy street scene near Stone's downtown office. Passing a dusty little second-hand bookshop, he stops and peers inside. A tattered copy of Science Marvel Tales is lying in the window.

"That's a valuable one," says the shopkeeper. "The last issue--they didn't make it through the war. It'll cost you a bit."

"That's okay," says Stone. "The cost doesn't matter. All I'm looking for is a form, a piece of paper, something . . . some way to renew."

He turns the stiffened pages,

yellow with age--and there, opened before him, is the haunting illustration he saw in the Uncanny office.

Version Two is set in a suburb of Chicago, where an elderly man is living in bored retirement with his daughter and young grandson. The high point of his day is the arrival of the mail.

"Grandpa, what's this!" says the boy one afternoon. In the mail is a brand new issue of a 1930s pulp, Science Marvel Tales, addressed to the old man. He has the same reaction as above: the issue "even smells right." Though he soon concludes that it's some sort of reprint edition, at first he half believes that it's his old 1930s subscription, somehow lost in the mail for half a century. He'd actually subscribed to the magazine at age sixteen, using money saved up from his newspaper route. How he'd loved it then! But the subscription had been interrupted by the family's moving during the Depression. "I remember how broken-hearted I was when I had to sell off my collection," he recalls. "Probably got all of 25 cents for it!"

He, too, soon receives a note from the Circulation Manager: "Dear Sir, We're sorry for the interruption in your subscription due to your change of address, but we've finally located you."

"They must have gotten your name from their old subscription rolls," says his daughter. "You know how mailing lists are. Once you're on, they never take you off!"

The old man loses himself happily in the old stories and fantastic illustrations. His grandson is equally intrigued. "You really love those stories, don't you, Grandpa?" he says.

"I sure do," says the old man. "They don't write 'em like this anymore." He recalls how he'd always wanted to be an author, even wrote up a bunch of stories--but he'd never had the confidence to submit any of them. "I probably still have a few in the trunk upstairs."

"Why don't you send them one, Dad?" asks his daughter.

"Oh, no, they're not looking for new submissions," he says. "These are obviously the original stories, you understand? From the thirties."

"Well," says his daughter, "so are yours. And they're certainly not doing anyone any good sitting up there in the trunk. Why not show them one? You never know until you try."

But the old man does not; he's sure that the downtown address at the front of the magazine is long since gone. The boy, however, is unaware of this; to him the address must be real. Dusting off an ancient manuscript from the grandfather's trunk, he takes it into the city.

The Science Marvel office is as described above. The boy has an amiable encounter with the editor, who assures him that the magazine is always looking for the work of new, undiscovered writers. After a discussion of rates--

"A quarter cent a word."

"Wow, writers sure aren't paid much, are they?"

"You're absolutely right, son, it's a very tough way to make a living."

--he leaves his grandfather's story atop a huge pile of manuscripts.

The following month, the magazine fails to arrive, and the boy is dismayed to learn that the office building he'd visited has just been demolished for a new high-rise. He wonders where the publishing company has gone.

Later, passing a dusty second-hand bookshop, he notices a fly-blown copy of a 1939 Science Marvel Tales in the window and attempts

to buy it.

"That one's pretty valuable," says the bookseller. "It's the last issue."

"Oh, no! You mean they went under?"

"Afraid so, son. That's the way it is with magazines. This one'll cost you seven bucks."

"That's a lot of money," says the boy. "How do I know it's really so old?" He's sure the issue isn't really from 1939, like it says on the cover; it looks like just another one of Grandpa's reprints, one that simply got yellowed from the sunlight. Then he turns the pages--and his eyes widen with excitement . . .

Cut to the family at home. "So even though I knew it wasn't really old," says the boy, "I paid him anyway--because look . . ." Featured in the magazine, suitably illustrated, is his grandfather's story.

We leave the old man happy ... but wondering, just the same, how long he's now going to have to wait for the check.

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Continued from p. 18:

scious volition, I was cringing and cowering dumbly before him, my eyes tight shut, and my arm raised to ward off the blow my sensitive reflexes told me was forthcoming. The poor fellow supposed he had wrenched my arm and was horribly embarrassed, and most sincerely and humbly contrite and apologetic. I did my best to make him feel at ease, but I could not explain, and for all the rest of the day my nerves were fairly quivering.

But I suppose my friends attribute my strangeness at times to artistic temperament, together with my absolute refusal to wear low-backed evening gowns--which would reveal the lash marks that Gomez put across my shoulders for all time.

Four years have passed since I rode across the Rio Grande on Cabrona's horse. My slavery no longer haunts my dreams, and the whole seems as a dim nightmare. It has cost me much to bring up those horrid memories, and I hope that I will be leniently judged, and that my tale will aid other girls who may be menaced by like villains. Then I will be satisfied.

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Continued from p. 24:

for you upstream, near the mine. When you found I couldn't be frightened, you placed that written note on the machine gun platform."

"Proof!" Wanger screamed. "You're just talking words . . ."

"I said there was proof and there is. The moment you came here Bainly suspected you. Before you killed him he had time to write a note and leave it for me to see.

"He left that note on something he knew you wouldn't destroy, Wanger. On one of your own lamps. You'll note the side of it is decorated with paper.

"Bainly wrote on that paper, using rice water for ink. It's an old trick, used occasionally by the government for secret communications. The rice water doesn't show, but when iodine is applied to it, the writing becomes visible.

"You're coming downriver with me after I have seen the native kapalas and explained what happened. Then I'm going to send a seaplane up here with hospital supplies.

"But long before that, Wanger, you'll be hanged for murder."

# THE STONES OF DESTINY

by Robert E. Howard

Time and again I have heard people in conversation remark on the evils of old-time slavery and express gratitude that such practices have gone out of existence. I listen, silent, and wonder what those people would say if I spoke--if I told them-- My life, my frightful experiences are behind me, no one knows except myself--or has known up to this time. I could have kept my secret until death had I so wished and it is of my own accord that I am baring my shameful past, in the hope that my story will preserve some innocent girl from a like fate.

Not long ago, a friend of mine, just returned from the East, was telling me tales that he had heard and sights that he had seen of India and other parts of Asia and of the Barbary States of North Africa.

"The slave trade is rampant," said he, "in spite of all the British Government is doing toward stamping it out. It is definitely known that a secret 'slave road' runs from the interior lakes to Suez and Zanzibar, over which thousands of unfortunate natives pass every year, yoked and driven like oxen. And in Zanzibar and other East Coast towns there are secret slave markets, where not only negroes are sold, but white women also, Circassian girls and Jewesses that the Turks sell to wandering slave traders." He went on to relate some of the cruelties he had seen practiced on slaves, many of which were not of a printable nature, and added, "You'd better be happy that you live in a civilized country where nothing of the sort can happen."

I looked straight at him and said, "Yes, that is what you think. But are you right? Suppose I told you that American girls are in as much danger of slavery as Asiatic women--suppose I told you that I had been a slave?"

To say that he was astounded would be putting it mildly. He believed me to be joking at first. Just what prompted me to confide the shameful secret which I had so jealously guarded for years, I cannot explain. Perhaps it is the human impulse to share everything with one of your own kind. I do not know.

However, I told him all upon a sudden impulse, as is my nature. Obeying impulses has ruled and to an extent ruined my life.

After I told him, he was thoughtful for some time and said, "Don't you think that you had better make public your experience?"

I shrank at the idea. "How can you think of such a thing?"

"I understand, of course," he answered. "But we must sacrifice ourselves for the general good, to some extent. The disclosure might save some child, innocent as you were at the time. Would not that be worth the humiliation? I think that it should."

So, after long thought, I came to the conclusion, difficult though it was, that it would be selfish in me to hide in my bosom facts which might serve to guide other feet aright.

I am an American, not by birth, but choice. I was born in Russia, in that fierce and savage country east of the Volga River, but was brought to America by an aunt when so small that now my memories of

that dim other land are but a vague haze of broad, snowy steppes, bearded faces, shaggy small horses and high kalpaks--hats of Astrakhan fur.

My aunt was not the ordinary type of European immigrant; she was comfortably situated and her removal to America was more to satisfy a love for travelling than anything else. I was selected from my brothers and sisters to accompany her, and the villagers predicted that I would grow to be a fine lady in the great new country.

After travelling rather extensively in Canada, Mexico and the United States, my aunt, on a whim, decided to settle in New Orleans, its cosmopolitan touch, its tinge of the old world, somehow suiting her rather romantic nature. We lived in an old mansion, not far off Canal Street, which she had purchased from the descendants of a once wealthy and prominent French family, and my aunt opened an antique shop in a genteel quarter. My life for many years was placid and uneventful. I attended a Greek Catholic school, and grew up into a slender, handsome girl, vain and frivolous, to be sure, and quite aware that I possessed charms beyond the average, but clean and modest, and thanks to the teachings of my aunt, the possessor of a conscience that was really Puritanical in its virtue.

I went to picture shows occasionally with the young French and Italian youths of the neighborhood, and of course had my innocent flirtations, many of which were broken up by the application of my aunt's slipper--for she was purely old-world in regards to ideas of raising children--but up to the age of seventeen I had scarcely been kissed by a boy. I tell all this in order that you who read this may be lenient in your judgment upon me and believe that the shame that fell upon me was not because of my own depravity, but if the fault was mine, of my youth and lack of knowledge--perhaps, if my aunt had told me more and switched me less--yet, how could she know? How could anyone know? And I--I was innocent--you must--you must believe me!

I met the man who called himself Juan la Ferez at a reception at a house of a friend. He was slim, dark, handsome, gallant. I, a young girl just blossoming into womanhood, shy, eager for attention, yet easily embarrassed. He was Latin, my blood is Russian--hot, fiery. There was something in the way he glanced at me with his passionate eyes, something in his soft, caressing tones, something in the way he touched my hand, that fired my blood and turned me dizzy with my first realization of womanhood. He said, too, that he was of an old noble Spanish line of Venezuela and that gave him a still more romantic appearance in my eyes. He asked for and received permission to call at my house, which he did the following evening. My aunt, at first suspicious of him, soon thawed toward him, as he insinuated himself into her good will by his old-world manners and gallantry of speech and action. After a perfect sedate evening, he took his departure, and I stayed awake long that night, recalling his every word, movement, glance, the curl of his lips. I was inexpressibly thrilled. When I fell to comparing him with the youths of my acquaintance, they dwindled out of all comparison.

Those I had thought admirable now seemed boorish, childish, unsophisticated. They shrank to insignificance beside this cultured man of the world. Vanity and delusions! I went with my head in the air thereafter, barely deigning to notice the existence of such humble acquaintances, who less fortunate had to content themselves with "mere boys." He called at my house, he took me to the theater, he took me on excursion boats up and down the river--he even sere-

naded me beneath my window at night in approved Latin style, strumming a mandolin beautifully and singing a haunting Spanish love song, while the neighboring girls nearly perished of envy, and I, deluded little fool, traversed the seven peaks of rapture. Naturally, I had been warned of the passionate nature of the men of the South, and had been on my guard lest his fiery nature sweep me off my feet. But never was a courtship carried on in a more decorous manner. Never a word did he say that might be construed as an insult, nor did he in his actions ever offer the slightest familiarity. And I--I was disappointed! Sometimes I thought he deemed me too much of a girl to entertain any thoughts of sex toward me. This idea I hotly resented. But at last, one beautiful moonlight night on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain, he took my hand, touched it to his lips and asked me to marry him. I was thrilled; ecstatic. My mind whirled dizzily. Faintly I heard myself saying, "No, no, Juan! My aunt would never consent to it--I am too young."

"No, no!" He had put an arm about me now. "You must be mine, I cannot live without you! I want you, my beautiful little goddess, my lovely child of delight!"

"My aunt--" I said faintly.

"She need not know until afterward! Come, my life, fly away with me, my pretty little birdling! We will be married and then return and your dear aunt will forgive us."

"You promise?" I asked, piteously hesitant.

"I swear it!" he exclaimed. "I love your aunt like a mother! We will go, the good priest shall marry us, then we will return for her blessing. After that we will all go to my estate in Venezuela.

"There you shall be little queen of all you survey. Broad, fertile lands shall be yours and a wonderful hacienda, where you may reign like a princess of the blood with innumerable servants to attend you. I am wealthy and powerful. Come, come now."

I was in his arms. He crushed me in his embrace; for a moment I lay passive, unresisting and trembling, then as he pressed his lips against mine and kissed me passionately again and again, my hot blood was roused and, throwing my arms about his neck, I answered his kisses. Then we heard my aunt, who had chaperoned us, approaching; she having lingered at one of the refreshment stands to speak to a friend while we had strolled on to the lake shore. When she reached us we were decorously discussing some trivial matter and I said nothing to her of the affair, neither then nor later.

The very next night I got permission to spend a night with a girl friend, and immediately after dark met Juan upon the wharfs. I had expected that he would have a priest with him, but he was alone.

"Are we not to be married here?" I asked in surprise.

"My love, I fear your aunt would have it annulled if she knew of it immediately," he answered. "And there is another thing. There is a priest, a man of my own country, a wonderful man, who did me a great favor many years ago and I promised him he should marry me. You do not mind? He is now at Corpus Christi; just a little ways, we can take a boat now, at once, my love."

I was so infatuated with Juan that I would have sailed with him to Australia, married or unmarried, and it made no difference to me whether a Roman Catholic or a Greek priest married me. Yet I shrank, from natural modesty, at the thought of travelling with an unmarried man, even my fiancé. But when he took me in his arms, and coaxed me with endearing phrases, my resistance melted. No woman can with-

stand the man she really loves, in anything, and I did love Juan, though later I came to hate him as only Russian women can hate.

Yet neither then nor later did Juan offer me undue familiarity. I passed upon shipboard as his sister, and we occupied separate staterooms. Young as I was, I knew a little, a very little, of mankind's attitude toward women and thus it was that I saw in Juan a true knight, a man better and nobler than other men.

We landed at Corpus Christi without event, and Juan left me at a hotel while he went forth, ostensibly to look for the priest who was his friend. Soon he returned with word that the priest was at Brownsville, temporarily, and suggested that instead of waiting for him, we motor over to that town. I readily agreed, for I had found the trip exhilarating and wished to prolong it.

So Juan hired an automobile and we proceeded to Brownsville. There again he sought the imaginary priest and, coming back, told me the priest was holding a council or conference with other priests from the interior of Mexico and would not be at leisure for an hour or two. Juan then suggested that we cross the river, so that I might get a sight of Mexico. To this I joyfully agreed, and we crossed the narrow bridge that spans the yellow, muddy Rio Grande at that part. The middle of that bridge marks the boundary line; on the one end flies the American flag, on the other the flag of the Republic of Mexico. The guards at the Mexican end, burly, mustached fellows, heavily armed, offered a marked contrast to the clean-cut American youth of the American end. These Mexicans stopped us and searched the car for contraband, eyeing me insolently. And one of them said something to Juan and nudged his companion. Though Juan denied it, it seemed to me that the men knew him. The town of Matamoros lies back from the river, a bare squalid place. Since then I have seen other Mexican towns along the border, and some of them equal American cities of the same size. But Matamoros more resembles the stronghold of bandits than anything else. Everywhere I saw dirty, ragged peons, mostly barefooted; many carried rifles or pistols and many wore cartridge-belts strapped about their waists. Before a drab barrack a few languid soldiers pretended to mount guard and here and there among the many saloons rurales with gaudy costumes drank mescal and boasted. The town is roughly built about a large square, on one side of which is a cathedral, while the rest of the square is taken up largely by saloons and gambling halls. To one of these Juan took me, though it was with much trepidation that I entered.

We sat at a table and a woman brought us drinks. She was a hard-faced Mexican woman of middle age, and after taking a long glance at me, she spoke rapidly to Juan in Spanish, which I did not understand. He laughed, shook his head, and answered her, repeating the name Gomez, upon which she nodded understandingly and went away. I sipped nervously at the beverage brought us and threw frightened glances about at the rough, loud-spoken Mexicans that thronged the bar. Several spoke to Juan familiarly and he laughed and answered in the same manner. I did not understand and I was more perplexed when I asked to leave and he merely laughed and told me we would later. The Mexican behind the bar would glance at me and laugh loudly.

Then a man entered, the first glance of whom inspired me with fear. He was a large Mexican of very swarthy complexion, very gaudily dressed. To my angry astonishment he came across the saloon at once and seated himself at our table, sweeping off his wide sombrero to me in a manner that seemed mocking and sarcastic. Then he

and Juan engaged in a long conversation, during which the man seemed much pleased, often bursting into a loud guffaw, and slapping himself on the leg. Then before my eyes--and even then I did not understand--the Mexican took a number of banknotes and gave them to Juan, who rose, laughed, and walked out without another word or glance at me.

The Mexican laughed, too, and said in English, "You are very pretty, senorita; I am Senor Gomez that you shall know better, much better." And he laughed as at a huge joke.

"But where is Juan going?" I asked, frightened and perplexed. "We were waiting for a priest, to be married."

Gomez laughed louder than ever and shook a finger at me in a roguish manner. "Ah, that Juan, he is a mischievous fellow and one can never depend on him. You would much better forget all about that Juan, who is probably making love to some other girl right now, and regard that good Gomez."

"I don't understand--" I quavered, rising.

"Ah, but you shall," he answered blandly, and he too rose. "Come with me. You little fool, Juan will not return. He is on his way to Galveston right now."

Dazed and bewildered, I followed him, hardly knowing what I was doing. There was a very fine automobile outside the saloon, with a Mexican youth as chauffeur.

Gomez opened the door persuasively and bade me, "Enter, senorita." But I drew back, frightened. Then he showed his true nature for the first time.

"Curse you!" he swore. "Must I be humble to a silly wench? Do as I say!"

And to my horror he caught me up in his powerful arms and tossed me into the automobile. I struggled and screamed, but though there were rurales, soldiers and white men, bartenders, in sight, they merely laughed. Gomez climbed in beside me.

"Scream, you little fool," he said angrily. "No one will heed you; drive to the ranchero and waste no time."

Gomez scarcely had a word to say, though he often looked at me and laughed, during the whole trip which lasted nearly all day, though the driver drove at a high rate of speed. His ranch lay many miles from the border and the road lay over a dreary expanse of sand, cactus, greasewood and chapparal bushes.

It was night before we emerged into slightly more fertile country, and came to his ranchero, a huddle of corrals and 'dobe peon houses, dominated by a rather pretentious hacienda, built, like most of the kind, about an inner court or patio, and set off by deep cool verandas. For a woman who came to it of her own choice, it might have seemed fine and inviting, but to me it was a prison house for three long, shameful years.

Gomez led me into the hacienda, and waving his hand, said, "Juan said you should be queen of a hacienda, eh? Then so you shall be! Ha! Ha!"

"You are not going to keep me here?" I asked, unbelieving.

"Keep you here!" he exclaimed. "Not keep you here? After paying that shrewd fellow Juan more pesos than any wench is worth? Faugh, don't be a fool, or think Gomez is one. Juan has brought me other girls, but none so pretty. You I shall keep."

"No, no!" I exclaimed. "You can't, you can't mean it, you wouldn't be so cruel."

"No?" he asked, with an ugly lift of his lip. "Of that you shall be judge."

Food was served to us in the wide dining hall by a withered crone, and afterwards Gomez led the way to a room whose furnishings showed that it had been occupied by women before.

"This shall be your chamber, senorita," he said. "You will note that the windows are barred; moreover, you will but waste your time with the door for it will be bolted." Then he bowed himself out and I looked about me at the room that was to be part of my prison for long. It was handsomely furnished, but, as Gomez had said, the windows were heavily barred.

Very little of anything I saw or heard made meaning to me, so numbed were my mind and soul at the disclosure of Juan's perfidy, which I could not now doubt, though I fiercely denied to myself. Ah, the vileness of men! How could Juan deceive me so, I who had trusted him with the innocent faith of a child, I who had come to him with open arms and raised lips--Juan, wherever you are, God have mercy on your soul if we ever meet!

Completely outdone, soul and mind and body, I grew sleepy in spite of torment and began to disrobe. I thought of Juan, my girlish mind still too dazed to realize the full extent of his treachery. I had taken off my dress and laid it across a chair, when to my utter horror the door opened and Gomez entered the room. Crimson-faced with shame and outraged modesty, I shrank back, vainly striving to shield myself from his lascivious gaze.

"Ah, how beautiful--and how unusually modest," he said. "Yet, my dear, your charms are still obscured too much. Let us adjust that." And he came forward and took me by the arm. At the touch of his hand on my bare flesh, I very nearly fainted, such was the loathing and fear he inspired in me. I jerked away from him and shrank back until the wall stopped my further flight. He advanced, smiling in a way to make my very flesh crawl. Young though I was, I saw his intention in his eyes and my mind reeled with terror.

I threw out my hands, eyes staring in horror, as he approached. "No, no!" I begged. "Not that, please, please!" Then as he laid his hands upon me, I slipped to the floor before him, clasping his very feet, begging and pleading with him to spare me. He merely laughed at me.

He put his hands under my arms and raised me to my feet. Then he took me in his arms and showered kisses upon me, hot, lustful kisses under which I writhed helplessly. With a strength born of despair, I resisted him and though I was a weak girl and he a strong man, my resistance seemed to enrage him.

"You had better learn who is master here," he said angrily, "and I suppose you had better have your lesson now. They all require it sooner or later, and the sooner you know enough to be meek and submissive, the better it will be for you."

He flung me violently to the floor, and stepping to the wall took down a cruel quirt such as Mexican vaqueros use. With this in his hand, he approached me. I cannot give a detailed narrative of what followed. I do not even like to think about it. All my life I had been used to gentle and courteous treatment; my most severe punishments had been my aunt's spankings. Before I left the ranch of Gomez I found more depths of more hells than most women know exist, yet I cannot say that any surpassed that in which for the first time in my life the lash descended upon my shrinking shoulders, leaving a long, red welt across my bare, tender skin. That first whipping was a scarlet purgatory, which other lashings equalled but never excelled. I fainted before it was over, and how long he flayed my unconscious form, I do not know, but I came to myself lying upon a couch. My first impression was of a hideous burning torture that extended over my whole body; my next, of Gomez standing over me,

swishing the whip restlessly, a cruel glitter in his eyes.

"Very good," he said, grimly. "Now are you ready to acknowledge your master or shall we continue the lesson?" And he made a motion of raising the whip.

I shrieked and writhed, holding out my hands imploringly; I was wordless from fear and torture, I could only whimper and prostrate myself before him.

"Very good," he said again. "Then come here to me." And in terrible fear of another lashing, reeling, half able to stand, I went to him, half insane from shame, yet overpowered by cringing fear--I came to him.

Yes, I came to him, with lagging steps and head hung in shame, my face hid in my hands.

There is little use to reiterate by details my life on the Gomez ranch. The telling of it would drive me half insane and now I do not see how I lived through it. Juan la Ferez was a smooth and treacherous snake; Gomez was a beast. For three years I endured the fullest extents of his beastliness. I was a slave, and nothing more or less, the slave of Gomez, betrayed and sold by Juan la Ferez. Then I knew why Juan had never attempted anything out of the way upon me. It was because he wished to present me to Gomez pure and unsullied, and thereby gain a higher price for me; for Gomez was that type of man that delights in the ruin of a virtuous girl. My innocence filled him with a beastly delight and he never tired of inventing ways to outrage my modesty and decency.

I have heard tales told by old slave negroes of the ways of cruel plantation men in the slave days of America, but none of those cruelties ever surpassed those to which I was daily subjected. Gomez delighted in the fact that I was his slave. He made no attempt to gain my affection. He did not want it. He wanted me to fear and cringe to him and his wish was gratified. His lust did not stop at the gratifying of his fleshly desires. He was undoubtedly the most cruel fiend that ever existed. I have since studied psychology, and now know that Gomez missed very little being a degenerate in the utmost meaning of the word. He was a man who derived pleasure from the torture of others. The whippings he gave me afforded him as much gratification as the caresses he bestowed on me. But I knew nor cared nothing of such science then. All I knew was that Gomez was my master, that he was a beast who stopped at nothing in the fulfillment of his wishes, that if I resisted him in any way I would receive a lashing. And not merely because of disobedience did he whip me, but often as not in the way of cruel sport, for as he had said, I had my lesson and knew enough to obey him in his every word. Sometimes when intoxicated upon mescal, he would enter my room at night and torture me in various ingenious ways until sometimes his brutality would actually render me unconscious.

And very often he would bind me and lash me into insensibility. He maintained all the power of a feudal lord upon his ranch, and the unhappy peons were as much his slaves as the serfs of the Middle Ages. Ignorance, poverty, serfdom, that is the curse of Mexico today, as it has been for ages.

There was a whipping post in front of the peon huts, where disobedient serfs were punished, both men and women; and Gomez showed the depths of his depravity when he bound me there and lashed me before the assembled peons, for not even a Kurd nor a Tatar would so publicly degrade one of his girl slaves before the eyes of inferiors.

How I lived through those three years, I do not know unless it was because of the blood that is mine. I had often wished that I had been a born American, but I do not believe that any American girl could

have endured what I did and lived. But I come of a race whose women are used to cruelty. I was only going through what countless thousands of Russian women have gone through. Though I, myself, had never had to endure abuse, yet the blood of endurance was in me. Gomez himself knew that, in a vague way, and he paid me the dubious compliment of telling me that while he had always soon grown tired of other women, he had never wearied of me.

"But I will break you!" he used to say. "I will tame you!"

I could not see how a woman could be more "tamed." I hastened to comply with his every wish, I cringed and fawned on him to avoid punishment, and after cruel whippings I crawled to him and kissed his hands. And so I told him.

"Yes," he answered, scowling, "you are wise! You are not like other women; I never saw a Russian girl before, and I never saw a woman like you. You are pliant, yielding --and the more a thing gives, the more difficult it is to break. You are my slave now, but if you should escape tonight, in a few months none could ever tell that you had been used as I have used you. Your attraction would be as great as ever; you would forget me, men would fawn upon you and you would be as happy as if you had never heard of Gomez. But I will break you yet! When Gomez puts his stamp upon a woman, she wears it for life! She is broken! And so shall you! I will break you forever." I believe that it was this strange obsession to "break me" that kept him from killing me in his drunken furies.

Sometimes there were visitors at the ranch, caballeros from neighboring ranches, and then high and drunken revelry was held. Of these I will say nothing; sometimes women were brought and the licentiousness was indescribable. I learned the language to some extent and found that a while girl captive upon a Mexican ranch was no novelty. Such things had gone on for years; the wealthy ranchers of the country were always in the market for pretty girls and such beasts as Juan la Ferez supply their demand. The position of these victims was as I have described my own. The lecherous nature of their captors was always coupled with the feeling that they are wreaking vengeance upon their powerful and hated neighbors across the Rio Grande, which is merely the vengeance of barbarians.

Sometimes, too, women were brought to the ranch by Gomez, who only stayed a few days, bold-faced Mexican women of the better class, usually. Then was added the further humiliation, that of forcing me to attend them with the duties of a maid. Some were kind, in their way, pitying me and sometimes caressing me; some indifferent, some spiteful, wreaking on me insults and petty abuse. But I soon grew indifferent to kindness or abuse. I lived in a perpetual state of terror. I was afraid of the peons of the ranch, of the crones that cooked for Gomez, of the women that Gomez brought there--but all this fear was dominated and overshadowed by my fear of Gomez himself. Three times I tried to kill Gomez, once with a rifle I snatched from him, twice with a stiletto secured the same way. And each time I failed and was rewarded with such a terrible lashing that I could never muster courage again after the third attempt. Then several times I attempted to escape, even starting across the desert on foot. Each time I was brought back and at last Gomez bound me to the whipping post and whipped me nearly to death. I was left hanging there for hours until the world was merely a red sea where torturing waves beat endlessly upon my nearly lifeless form. There it seemed that flesh and blood could stand no more and I wished to die. But I could not. Eventually

the bloody fogs lifted and I came back to the world--and to Gomez.

That night one of his banquets was held, and in the state I was, I was forced to attend. There I saw for the first time Juan Cabrona, a rancher whose holdings were some miles distant. I had cause to remember Cabrona later. Then I had been with Gomez for nearly two years.

Gomez, like most wealthy Mexicans, dabbled more or less in the politics of the country, but either he was skilled in picking the winning side, or remarkably lucky, for all the time I was at his ranch, there was never a raid of bandits, never an "investigation" by Federal troops. True, the country was sparsely settled and unimportant from a military standpoint.

But altercations occurred among the ranchers themselves and at last Cabrona and Gomez had an open break. That was about a year after I had seen Cabrona at the banquet. Gomez expressed his displeasure toward his former friend very often in my hearing, and I began to almost like Cabrona, simply because Gomez hated him, though I knew Cabrona was no better than my master.

But one day a note was smuggled to me by some means, the manner of which I never learned, and the contents were as follows: "Doubtless you wish to escape from Gomez. If so, steal out of the hacienda just after dark, and walk straight east from the lower corral. I will meet you with horses and conduct you to the border. Cabrona."

My mind was in a whirl upon reading this. I half suspected Gomez of a cruel trick; half suspected that Cabrona was merely working to get me into his hands, for I could not see why he should wish to aid me. But after much thought I determined to follow the instructions, come what would; nothing could be more vile than my present situation and if it were merely a change of masters, Cabrona could be no more cruel than Gomez. Then I was confronted with the problem of getting out of the house alone and unwatched. The doors were never bolted upon me, but I was always closely watched, though of late I had shown so little spirit that the vigilance was slightly relaxed, under the impression that I would not dare try to escape. But that evening, Gomez, being displeased at the wife of a peon, took her to the whipping post to give her a flogging, with the result that everyone went to watch it, leaving the house quite unguarded. I slipped out, just as dusk was falling, and hurried to the lower corral, unobserved. There I halted for an instant to glance back at the hacienda which I hoped I was seeing for the last time. The great house reared dark, silent and forbidding, a shameful prison wherein I had been despoiled of my girlhood, my innocence, my purity.

Beyond it, before the huts, there was a glimmer of torches lighting up a scene such as I had seen time and time before--a scene such as I had often enacted as the chief victim. Ribald shouts and obscene jests sounded from the assembled servants and peons as Gomez carried out the flogging with his usual cruelty and indecency.

It was a scene characteristic of that vile place that I carried away as a mental picture.

I struck off due east, as directed, and after walking some distance, came upon Cabrona waiting with horses. He bade me mount and I did so, whereupon he led the way toward the river, swinging wide to avoid the Gomez possessions. We rode all night with scarcely a word between us, and dawn found us upon the bank of the Rio Grande. Cabrona briefly directed me how to avoid the quicksand in crossing, and was turning to ride away when I stopped him.

"But why did you do this thing for me?" I asked.

"To avenge myself upon Gomez," he answered. "I care nothing for

you, or any other gringo woman. I'd have kept you myself, only Gomez would have stolen you back. Now get across the river as fast as you can and keep on riding, or the vaqueros of Gomez will come up with you and all my task will be for nothing."

So saying, he turned and rode away. In a sudden panic, as I thought of pursuit, I urged my mount recklessly across the river, and raced the already weary horse until the Rio Grande was merely a thin line of silver in the distance behind me. I could hardly realize that I was free. I laughed, I sang, I waved my arms. Anyone seeing me would have thought me insane. Free! After three years, three centuries! Three eternities! Ah, no one can appreciate that freedom is the greatest of all blessings unless one has been like myself, a slave.

It did not matter that I was among strangers, and without money; I was free in my own land.

Some small town I came to eventually, and sold the horse Cabrona had given me for enough money to pay my fare to New Orleans. I was asked no questions nad I vouchsafed no explanation to anyone. The shadow of my fear of Gomez was on me and it rode me hard, though I knew it improbable that he would follow me. But I did not draw a free breath until the train pulled into New Orleans and the old familiar sights met my eyes. Three years? It seemed rather three hundred years. Three years of shame and torture since I had left New Orleans, young, pure, vibrant for life and love, a child of seventeen; I returned a woman of twenty, and far older in experience, violated, defiled, broken like a flower upon the stones of Destiny.

In fear and trembling I approached my aunt's house. How would she receive me? I had left without even leaving a note; she had heard no word from me in all the time. Would she drive me out again? Could it be that she would forgive me?

Three times I walked past the house, afraid to enter; the fourth time I went to a side door, by which I used to enter after school. I opened the door stealthily and entered. My aunt sat before the wide fireplace. She had aged a great deal. For a moment I stood there, trembling, then she saw me; her knitting tumbled from her hands, and I fell into her arms and lay upon her bosom, my face hid in her shoulder, while she caressed me, murmuring endearments over and over at me as she had when I was a child. Poor soul, she had thought me dead and not even to her, though it tore my very soul to deceive her, could I admit the full depth of my degradation. I lied to her, for I told her Juan la Ferez had betrayed and then deserted me. Yet I cannot blame myself overmuch, for the full truth would have unhinged her mind, I fear. I did not stay long in New Orleans where the people knew me. My aunt gave me money to go where I wished, promising to join me wherever I went. I went east, to New York. The sight of a Mexican or even a Spaniard or South American unnerved me for years afterward. There in New York I found opportunity to develop my musical talents, and in a short time found myself independent, admired and sought after. Gomez spoke truly when he said I would not break. But for long afterwards, my actions must sometimes have startled people.

For instance, I could not abide the touch of a man's hand and I often irritated my instructors by my insistence that they should not touch me. And the mere sight of a man with a riding crop or whip of any kind in his hand actually nauseated me. I remember at one time how startled a very good friend seemed, when for a joke he came up behind me unawares and seized my arm in a rather rude grasp. In an instant, and without any con-

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# LIGHT IN THE JUNGLE

by Carl Jacobi

At high noon Simms throttled down the launch engine and gazed ahead at the fourth of the strange warnings. It was a dried native head, mounted on a pole of bamboo, projecting from the silt-heavy water, close to the river shore.

Simms frowned and glanced uneasily out under the tattered awning at the walls of jungle, somnolent and poisonous green under a brassy sun. This was Murut country, North Borneo's most undisciplined district, but never before had he seen those outlawed war trophies displayed with such flagrant abandon.

For six days now he had been forging slowly up the Kinabatangan. His passage had disturbed clouds of snipe, and occasional groups of macaque monkeys had crowded to the water's edge to watch him solemnly. But he had seen no sign of human life--only those four shriveled heads with their mute threat of trouble. Now he switched off the ignition and listened. Pulsing to his ears over the arboreal roof came a dull distant throbbing. Drums . . .!

Five minutes later the launch was beached in the ooze of the opposite bank, hidden by overhanging liana vines. Considering the warning, Simms told himself it would be foolhardy to continue on the river. With the Station so close he could take the bush trail and return for the launch later. He leaped ashore, after a few moments' search found the trail, and began to follow it rapidly due east.

As he went on, he found himself mulling over the whole enigmatic situation. This was Murut country, yes, always a danger spot to the transient white man. Twenty miles farther upriver he could have understood the drums and those heads. But here, almost within shouting distance of the District Officer's Station, this attitude on the part of the tribes was a puzzle.

Had the District Officer come into trouble? It was what the Resident in Sandakan feared, D.O. Bainly having failed to send his regular quarterly report, and it was why Simms, acting government inspector, was here.

A tall, well-knit man, Simms, with a lean incisive face, dark grey eyes and coffee-colored hair, made dull by long exposure to a tropic sun. He wore a suit of whites which achieved a military appearance in spite of their shapelessness. A Cawnpore solar topi was tilted on his head with the puggree cloth hanging free down the back of his neck. He carried at his waist in a canvas holster a Spanish Ruby revolver to which he had become attached through long service.

The trail curved and twisted, following the windings of the river. Once Simms climbed a tree and focused his binoculars on a clearing on the farther shore. He could see a fire and what appeared to be a crowd of natives milling about it. But the distance was too great for details.

An hour later he came upon the Station: three nipa-thatch huts surrounded by a stockade of pointed piles; from the roof of one of the huts the Union-Jack hung like a limp dishcloth. There was an air of desertion about the place in

spite of its orderly appearance.

As he advanced to the gate a pistol shot cut screeing through the silence. A voice yelled:

"Get away from that wall, you damned native, or I'll . . ."

The words died, and the gate was flung open. Simms found himself facing a haggard white man, clad in shorts and singlet. For an instant they stared at each other.

"What's wrong here?" Simms said at last. "You're not the District Officer. Where's Bainly?"

The other grabbed his hand and pumped it vigorously. "No, I'm not Bainly. Come inside, and I'll explain."

Five minutes later Simms sat in the main quarters of the District Officer's hut, listening to the stranger haltingly tell his story. After the harsh sunlight of the compound, the latticed room was dark, cool and restful.

"My name's Wanger," the man said. "Bainly's dead. He was killed by natives five weeks ago."

Simms waited for him to continue. Wanger was a heavy, thick-set man with loose jowls and deep-set eyes. There was a tiny rectangular scar on his temple and the fore part of his head was bald, giving him a scholarly appearance. He had an avian trick of lowering his head suddenly and then peering upward as if looking through non-existent spectacles.

"I'm a trader," Wanger went on. "I came in from the north coast with a couple of dugouts full of trade junk for the natives. I usually don't go this far incountry. Here, as you know, the river is tabu to white men, and the government upholds that tabu.

"But business wasn't so good, and before I knew it I had reached this Station. Bainly put me up, and a few days later hell broke loose."

"Native uprising?" Simms broke in quietly.

Wanger shook his head. "Worse than that. Plague! An epidemic broke out in the three villages, and the natives began to die like flies. Bainly said it was bubonic.

"Anyway, one day one of the chiefs' wives died, and that cinched it. The devils came up here, and Bainly went outside the stockade to palaver. They got him with a blow pipe dart, carried the body away. Then they killed the Station's three police boys. I've been living next to that machine gun ever since."

For a long moment Simms sat there in silence after that.

"It's too bad," he said. "But why didn't you clear out? You must have had chances?"

Wanger shrugged. "Two reasons. I figured someone should be here at the Station, and I thought I'd better hold on until relief came. Mainly, though, I wanted to wait until things quieted down."

Simms nodded thoughtfully. "When I get back to the coast, I'll see you're properly rewarded."

That night Simms lay on his cot in the warm darkness and went over the situation again and again. No one needed to tell him that he had walked into a trap from which there was probably little chance of retreat. A bubonic outbreak among the interior tribes was serious business. It meant mutiny, head-hunting outbreaks. Even now, the Muruts, giving way to superstitious gods, had probably closed off the river trail behind him.

Sleep would not come, and he rose at length and went out into the compound. The night was humid and heavy with a threat of the coming monsoon. Far off a Skipping-on-the-ice-bird sounded its queer call. A leopard coughed somewhere, and thunder was a muted growl deep in a black sky.

Suddenly Simms tensed. A darker shadow had appeared over the top of the stockade. Before Simms could raise his voice in alarm, something

was thrown to the hard earth of the compound with a dull thud. Then the shadow disappeared.

Simms darted to the stockade gate, unlatched it and slipped through. He had a momentary glimpse of the shadow racing into the jungle trail.

On bare feet he sped in pursuit. Once within the wall of trees the blackness seemed absolute, broken only by a faint gleam of sky light probing the overhanging foliage. The government inspector moved by instinct, bred from years of wilderness experience.

On he ran. If his quarry were aware it was being followed, it gave no sign. The jungle thinned as it descended toward the river shore.

An instant later there was the splash of a paddle, and a one-man dugout jerked out from the bank. Simms gave a hard sigh of defeat.

Was the intruder a Murut from one of the three villages? There seemed no other answer. And yet a Murut would hardly attack the Station alone.

Simms made his way back and with a puzzled scowl let himself through the gate. Then he saw what had been thrown into the compound. A dark object lay close to the stockade wall. The white man got a match out of his pocket, lit it and went slowly rigid.

He was staring down at all that was mortal of Fenton Bainly, the District Officer. The split nostrils and stitched eyelids showed only too plainly the man had died by torture.

The match went out. On legs that were dead things, Simms entered the house to call Wanger.

Morning came with a thick swamp miasma that hung over the Station like a veil of gauze. You could smell the rotting vegetation of the river, and you could feel the heat clinging close to your body as if it were another garment.

Simms sat perspiring in the main room of the hut, making out the first part of the report he must take back to Sandakan. The ink smudged and the paper was damp from drippings from his forehead. As he paused in his writing, his eyes fastened absently on the lamp in the center of the table. It was a cheap lighting instrument, made probably by Malay craftsmen, an urn-shaped vessel with the pottery sides decorated with colored rice paper.

Wanger noted his gaze and nodded. "My stock and trade," he said. "I've got a couple hundred more just like it in my dugout at the river."

Simms looked up. "You mean you trade these to the natives? But what do they do for fuel?"

A short laugh came from the trader. "Oh, they're filled with kerosine," he explained. "It'll last a while. After that the natives can use 'em for ornaments. Come on down to the wharf, and I'll show you my stuff."

The two men left the room and followed the little path to the jetty. Wanger's two prahus were drawn up on the shore. Wanger moved to the stern of the nearest and drew out a large case, filled with lamps identical to the one in the District Officer's hut. There were other articles: knives, bolts of colored cloth, cheap beads and trinkets.

Later they returned to the Station. After the noon meal, Simms lit his pipe and announced his decision.

"I'm going to take a look at one of those villages," he said. "If there's bubonic there, I want to see how bad the outbreak is."

Wanger stared. "Are you mad?" he gasped. "That stuff's the most contagious thing in the world. Besides, the Muruts will murder you before you get a chance to talk."

"i'll take my chances on that," Simms replied.

He took the dugout belonging to the Station, paddling alone up-

river. When he reached the first kampong, a hoarse shout went up, and he found himself in the center of a milling crowd of natives.

"Take me to your kapala," he said in Malay.

A moment later he stood before a tall Murut chief. The native wore a pigeon's blood ruby suspended from a thong around his neck, a bracelet of rubies on his wrist.

"I understand an evil sickness has come among your people," Simms said. "Perhaps I can help you."

The kapala's eyes glittered, and a snarl came to his lips. "The sickness has been caused by the white tuans. They have broken the river tabu."

Simms shook his head. "The tabu has not been broken. The government has ordered that no one go beyond your villages."

In the end, bluff accomplished it. Sullenly the kapala escorted Simms through the village. Simms saw it all, the sick, the dying, and then made preparations for his return.

As he was about to leave he noticed a well-worn path leading away from the village. Something, curiosity perhaps, prompted him to follow it across a dried-up stream bed up into higher ground. Presently he came upon a field of rocks and gravel, stretching away on both sides in a natural glade. The path ended here, and Simms stepped closer to examine the stone formations. Granite and crystalline limestone. The government inspector had a layman's knowledge of geology and even without a glass he could see traces of spinel, graphite, scapolite and mica in the limestone. Several crude stone hammers and other native implements lay scattered about. Simms lit his pipe and smoked a moment in deep thought. Then he turned slowly and made his way back to the river.

Back at the Station he found Wanger in a state of nervous tension.

"We've got to get out of here," the trader said, "while the getting is good."

Simms shook his head. "I'm afraid it's too late for that. On the way back I passed a big party of natives coming from downstream. They didn't see me because I hid in the reeds. But it doesn't take much guessing to know what they've been up to. They've closed off the river probably with a bamboo fence. The first white man that tries to tear that fence down will stop a bunch of blowpipe darts. We're cut off."

It was odd, Simms told himself as he went out into the compound. Bubonic usually didn't penetrate this far from the coast. As for the natives, the three villages in this district were comparatively tich and although untamed, seldom under normal circumstances caused the District Officer much trouble.

He climbed the little ladder to the six-foot platform of nibong wood where the machine gun was mounted. From this vantage point the gunner could sweep the trail over the walls of the stockade. He spent a moment examining the gun, saw that it was loaded and in working condition.

And then, about to descend, his eyes caught a roll of paper tucked under one of the extra ammunition belts piled on one side of the platform.

The paper was the official government stationery of the Station. Printed in the upper left-hand corner was the name: FENTON BAINLY. And scrawled below it in pencil were the words:

"East trail. Follow line from stockade to big Seraya tree one half mile, to clearing."

Simms crammed the note in his pocket and went down the ladder, lips screwed tight. Bewildered, he walked the length of the compound several times. Then casually he moved to the stockade gate, unlatched it and let himself out.

Twenty yards before him he saw

now the Seraya tree towering above the roof of the jungle. Simms sighted a line from the gate to this tree and began to move forward slowly.

The jungle was a clammy oven in the afternoon heat. Beyond the Seraya tree he found an old trail, indistinctly marked, leading onward in a straight line.

Had Bainly guessed that relief was due to come from the coast and left this note where he was sure the government inspector would find it? Such a supposition would mean that the District Officer for some unknown reason had refused to take Wanger, the trader, into his confidence.

Suddenly the way before him opened into a wide clearing. No living thing was in sight. A step at a time he began to pace slowly forward.

When it happened, it was his strength of arms that saved him. The ground suddenly opened up beneath his feet. Plummeted downward, he reached out by sheer instinct and grasped a vine that trailed along the jungle floor. The vine held, and he dangled there in space.

It was a deep pit dug into the ground, the opening at the surface hidden by light branches and underbrush. At the bottom was a double line of wooden stakes, sharpened to razor points. Had Simms not clutched that vine, he would have been impaled in a dozen places. A leopard trap!

Desperately he attempted to draw himself out. The vine, under his weight, gave way in a series of little jerks. His feet dug toe holes while gingerly he strove to shift his balance. Once he looked down, only to turn his eyes away again quickly. An inch at a time he clawed his way upward, heart pounding, breath searing in his chest. When he had almost reached the surface the vine slipped once again and he had to start anew. But this time a new firmness entered the length of leafy vegetation. He gave a last surge upward, drew himself over the edge and lay there, panting.

At length, haltingly, he made his way back to the Station. Then without a word he handed the trader the note he had found on the machine gun platform.

Wanger glanced at it, then threw it down casually.

"I should have warned you," he said. "Bainly had a terribly poor memory and was forever writing notes to remind himself of things. He must have left that paper there so he wouldn't forget something."

The drums were pounding louder that night as Simms and Wanger sat in the District Officer's hut, talking in low tones. The carbide lamp suspended from the ceiling had run out of fuel, and Simms had lit two of Wanger's trade lamps.

Abruptly the trader jerked to his feet. "We'll lose our heads if we don't get out of here soon," he cried. "We've got to try it. Now!"

Simms shook his head. "I'm staying. If I ran out now, all the years it's taken to build the Station's influence would be lost entirely."

Wanger lit a cigarette nervously. "Okay," he said, "I'll stick it out too, but if we aren't both murdered by tomorrow maybe I can change your mind."

Shortly after eleven o'clock the government inspector yawned, took one of the Malay trade lamps and went to his room. He shut the door behind him, placed the lamp on the table, sat down on the edge of his cot and began to take off his mosquito boots. To all appearances it was an ordinary pottery lamp with colored paper ornamenting the sides.

He found himself absently looking at the pottery base of the lamp as he bent to his task. An ordinary Malay lamp, covered with rice paper, colored gaily, it was sure to catch the eye of any Murut inlander to whom it was offered. Suddenly Simms'

eyes lingered on a certain spot on the lamp base. He took a small magnifying glass from his pocket and brought it into focus. Abruptly with a low exclamation he crossed to the medicine cabinet, took out a bottle of iodine. Then slowly and deliberately he began to smear the lamp's paper sides with the brownish medicine.

Twenty minutes later when he extinguished the light and lay down on the cot, his lips were set in a grim line.

The room was dark, lit only by a faint glow of starlight from the window. Outside insects droned. Simms lay on the cot motionless.

Abruptly stealthy footsteps sounded in the outer room. The door latch turned, and the door swung slowly open. A tall figure was silhouetted on the threshold.

To the cot that figure advanced. One hand rose slowly upward, and then Simms acted. He rolled off the cot even as the hands clawed downward. He leaped erect, drove out both fists and closed in.

With an oath the man threw him off, jerked out a revolver and fired point blank. A slug seared across Simms' shoulder, and a stream of hot blood began running down his arm. He bent down, dove for his assailant's legs.

On the floor they fought silently, each clawing for the other's throat. An upraised knee ground cruelly in Simms' groin. Once again the man triggered the gun, but the shot went wild.

The government inspector feinted with his left and dove his right to the other's jaw. Back and forth they exchanged blows. Then Simms sensed rather than saw the unguarded jaw and struck with every ounce of strength he possessed. There was a short cry and a moan, and the man slumped backward. Weakly Simms got to his feet.

Next morning Wanger sat in the main room of the District Officer's hut, his wrists tied behind him, his ankles securely bound.

"You see, Wanger," Simms said, "I might have fallen for your story if you hadn't tried to carry the details too far. It was you who brought bubonic up here. You knew the river was closed off to white men by a rigid tribal tabu. So you released the plague bacilli in the three Murut villages, planning that when the sickness had weakened or wiped out the natives, your activities and the passage of your stolen property would not be interfered with.

"Stolen property, Wanger. The ore found in certain varieties of crystalline limestone. In a word, rubies. In some way you learned that the Muruts in this district had been working a rich ruby mine for generations. The trade goods you brought in your dugout were just a blind. Except some of the Malay lamps. With those you did a simple trick. You chipped off a piece of the handle, making it sharp to cut the hand, and you infected it with the living bubonic germ. You yourself were immune to the disease.

"Once the plague was introduced among the natives, the rats and fleas which are always to be found in every kampong would do the rest, spread the sickness. Then with native resistance nullified and access to the ruby mine opened, you planned to step in, work the mine for a time, bring the stones back to the coast and smuggle them past the customs."

"You're guessing at all that," Wanger snarled. "There isn't a stick of proof . . ."

"There is proof. You killed District Officer Bainly when he got in your way, and you tried to frighten me out of here. It was one of your own natives who sneaked up the stockade wall and threw the body into the compound. The rest of your crew is probably waiting

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# ANTI

by Hugh B. Cave

"Leora. My dear. Can't you see you've invited every thief who reads the Sun to come for what you've got in this house? Can't you see what you've done?"

Tom Darcy, an old friend of hers on the college faculty, was talking about a story that had appeared the day before in the Sunday paper. In the House & Garden section. About her new home on the shore of Robin Lake.

"I don't care, Tom. We don't care." Sixty-two-year-old Leora Truesdale smiled contentedly at the small black cat cradled in her thin white arms. "Daddy would be so proud of me, designing my own home and having it written up."

"But letting the reporter write about your heart attack? With a picture of you on crutches?"

"Well, she promised not to mention those things. And I'm annoyed, yes. But what can I do about it now?"

What, indeed? she asked herself.

It was a handsome house, the writer had said. All the homes at the lake were handsome, but even in such spectacular company hers stood out. She herself had designed it. Also supervised its construction.

Imagine being sixty-two years old and doing something like that!

But while walking about the unfinished grounds she had suffered a mild heart attack and come a cropper in the rock garden. Result: one fractured ankle. Lucky for her, the house was ready for occupancy. When released from the hospital she had been able to move into it. After, of course, requesting a leave of absence from her teaching job and learning to get about on crutches.

She had not paid for the house and its exquisite furnishings out of her salary, the story almost maliciously pointed out. Junior-college teachers of architecture didn't make that kind of money. No, no. As the only daughter of a wealthy industrialist, she had inherited buckets of money and his mansion when he died. Before putting the mansion up for sale, she had moved most of its furnishings and all its precious paintings to her new home.

Tom Darcy had gazed at one of the paintings that day--the day after the story appeared in the paper--and said with a sigh, "Well, let's hope no harm's been done, Leora. I'll be coming around every day, and you have your phone if you need me. And your beloved Anti for company, of course."

At sixty-four Tom was two years older than she, and both were unmarried. They had long been good friends. Without his offering to do her shopping and help her out in other ways, she could not have moved into the house so soon.

Before departing that evening, he touched his lips to hers and scratched Anti behind one black ear. "I didn't mean to frighten you."

"I'm not frightened, Tom. Really."

And she hadn't been--then.

But now she was. Oh, Lord, yes--now she was!

At seven o'clock of a Sunday evening, two weeks after the story's appearance, she sat in the living room re-reading it. Anti lay curled

up beside her on the sofa, at quick glance looking like a blob of black ink shaken from an outsize fountain pen. (Leora still used fountain pens. Ball-points made everyone's handwriting look so lacking in character.)

The telephone began ringing.

Anti--she named him that because he so violently disliked certain things--raised his small head and looked toward the phone table on the far side of the room. Tensing himself to leap from the sofa, he made a sound that was more a screech of annoyance than a cat's normal meow.

"Now, darling, stop that!"

He looked up at her with what appeared to be defiance in his bright orange eyes.

"I said 'No!' You mustn't, Anti."

He went limp.

Rising, Leora took up her crutches and haltingly crossed the room to pick up the ringing phone. It was not one of the newer types without a base; she had her reasons for not wanting one of those. This was a good, solid instrument that rested respectably on a stand when not in use.

"Hello," she said, and waited.

For nine days now--ten, counting today--it had been happening at least twice a day, sometimes more often. The phone would ring. She would struggle on her crutches to answer whichever of the three in the house she happened to be closest to. Then, nothing.

Not even a sound of heavy breathing, as the police had told her to listen for.

"Some of these people don't say anything," she'd been told by a young Patrolman DiCorsi who came in answer to her complaint. "They just try to frighten you with heavy breathing. You're supposed to think you're about to be raped, ma'am."

"Me? Raped?"

"Ma'am, with some of them a woman's age makes no difference."

But this person who called her two or three times a day didn't go in for heavy breathing. He, if it was a he, made no sound at all. She would pick up the phone and say "Hello," and getting no answer might say "Hello" a second time and then, "Who is this?" And if she lost control of herself, as she seemed to be doing more and more frequently now, she would scream into the phone, "What do you want of me? Why do you keep calling like this?"

Once, just once, she thought she heard a laugh. Not from the person on the phone. From someone else in the background.

"Hello," she said again now, after having stood there more than a minute, leaning on her left crutch and holding the phone to her right ear.

No answer. No anything.

"I've called the police about this, you know," she said. "If you don't stop it, they'll find out sooner or later who you are, and you'll be in big trouble."

Silence.

"Do you hear me? You'll be in big trouble!"

And she heard the laugh again. Again not from the one making the call but from someone else, farther away. From a woman? She couldn't be sure, but thought so. A young woman. Being a teacher in a junior college, she knew what the laughter of young women sounded like.

The instrument clicked. She put her own phone back on its base and slowly returned to the sofa where Anti sat like a small black statue gazing not at her but at the phone.

An hour later Tom Darcy came, and she told him.

"It's that story in the paper, Leora," he said, shaking his head in condemnation as he began to unpack the bag of groceries he had brought. Then with the items lined up on the kitchen counter--he would put them on the shelves for her later--he turned and placed his

hands on her shoulders. "That damned story," he repeated. "It was such a mistake, my dear."

She stood there looking at his face. At the lines of anxiety in it. "No, Tom."

"Yes, it was. Someone who read about this house and all the treasures in it--some professional burglar, most likely--keeps calling now to find out if you're still confined to the house. Don't you see?"

"And?"

"The first time you don't answer, he'll think you're out and be here with bells on. No, not bells. Gloves, most likely, and a gun in his pocket. You should have a gun, Leora."

She wagged her head. "I wouldn't know what to do with one. And you're wrong about the reason for the calls, Tom. It would be more sensible for him just to keep an eye on the house and wait for me to go out. Then there wouldn't be the danger of having his calls traced."

"Have you been out?"

"A few times, to walk about the grounds." Leaning against him, because it was more comfortable to do that than to continue swaying on her crutches, she breathed a little sigh when he put a supportive arm around her. Then she said, "I told him today that I've called the police. He must know I've called the phone company too."

"Which might work if he uses the same phone all the time. But what if he's smart enough not to?"

"Tom," she breathed, "I don't know." It was all becoming too much for her. "I only know I'm scared half out of my wits."

"So sit yourself down, please." He pointed to a chair at the kitchen table. "And talk to me about it while I fix us some supper."

"Aren't you supposed to attend a meeting at the college this evening?"

"I've suddenly developed a headache. Or no--my arthritis has just kicked up."

He stayed until nearly midnight, but the telephone did not ring again until the next morning while she was standing at the kitchen sink doing her breakfast dishes. Anti always sat on the counter and watched when she did dishes. It was wrong of her to allow it, she knew that, but her every effort to put a stop to it had run up against a blank wall. Anti had a mind of his own about so many things.

And, of course, when the phone rang in the living room, he at once emitted his hissing scream of disapproval and shot off the counter like a rocket.

"No!" Leora shouted. "No, darling! Don't you dare!"

On his rush to the living room the cat looked back over a shoulder to determine if, maybe, just this once, his mistress might safely be disobeyed. The phone was still clamoring. Leora struggled to get herself in motion on her crutches.

"Anti, I said you mustn't!"

With an almost audible sigh her furry black companion slowed his pace to a walk and then sat down to watch her.

Leora lifted the phone from its cradle. "Yes?"

Silence.

"You're not really frightening me, you know," she said defiantly. And remembering what Tom Darcy had suggested: "I think you ought to know, too, that I have a gun."

There was no response. She put the phone down and looked at the seated cat.

"Do you know something, Anti? I'm getting a little fed up with this."

Anti moved his mouth in a faint meow.

"Meaning you are, too?"

Again a whispery response. Actually, about the only time Anti's meows were other than faint was when the ringing of the telephone evoked his shrieks of annoyance.

That evening Tom Darcy brought a gun and insisted she keep it.

When she protested, saying she didn't know the first thing about guns and at sixty-two years of age she was not about to learn, he patiently insisted she at least master the basics. It was a double-barrel twelve-gauge shotgun with two triggers. "And if you do have to use it," Tom said, "all you need do is point it in the general direction of whatever's coming at you and pull both triggers. This isn't a rifle or a handgun that shoots a single bullet and requires accurate aiming. It fires a pattern of pellets, and some are bound to find the mark."

To please him she carried the gun into her bedroom and left it leaning against the wall beside her bed. But after he departed--again at a late hour--she put it away in a corner of the bedroom closet, knowing she would never use it no matter what happened.

Half an hour later the phone rang.

She shared her big double bed with Anti, who slept outside the covers at her feet. There was a telephone on the bedside table, which had come from India and was crafted of teak with a copper inlay of the Taj Mahal. When the phone rang, Anti let out his usual scream and would surely have leaped onto the table had she not stopped him by throwing out an arm.

He sank back with a growl of frustration, and she picked up the instrument. After all, Tom Darcy might be right, and if she did not answer, the person calling would think she was not at home guarding such treasures as the Taj Mahal table.

"Hello." But even if Tom were right, it seemed silly of them to call at this hour. If she had been home for every call until now, why in the world would she be out tonight after midnight? No, no, Tom. These calls are being made for some other reason.

She heard someone cough. A man? A woman? She could not be sure. Then another sound, that could have been a clink of glass on glass, followed by the unmistakable sound of liquid being poured.

I'm dealing with more than one person here, she thought. The one calling me just coughed. Then someone came and poured him--her?--a drink of something.

"All right," she said, trying to keep her voice calm. "As I told you before, I have a gun. And if you think I'm alone here, you're mistaken about that, too. I am not."

Silence. So after waiting another minute and hearing nothing, she returned the phone to its cradle.

There were two more calls the following day, one at 8:15 in the morning, another at 4:30 in the afternoon. Not sure it was wise of her to make remarks to the person calling, she kept quiet on both occasions. After the second call, though, she felt an acute need to get out of the house for a while, if only for a brief stroll about the grounds.

"You want to come with me, Anti?" The little black cat was curled in a motionless question mark on a chair in the living room.

He opened one orange eye, gazed at her in silence for a few seconds, then closed it.

"Very well. I'll go alone."

She went out through the kitchen, which had a side door leading to an herb garden that was her pride and joy. Doing better with her crutches now, she spent nearly half an hour among the beds and was still nibbling a leaf of sweet basil when she returned to the house.

But when she would have opened the door to the kitchen, she found it locked. Stupidly she had neglected to press the button that would prevent it from locking itself.

For a moment she panicked, dropping one of her crutches and nearly falling. Retrieving the crutch demanded all the self-control she

could muster, and exhausted her. With her eyes closed and her whole slight body trembling, she leaned against the house and asked herself what she should do.

There was no other door she could use. After the first few phone calls she had made very sure all of them were kept locked. The windows, too. She couldn't climb in a window anyway, even if one were open.

What, then?

Tom had told her he would be late today. There was a faculty meeting he had to go to, and it might be seven or eight o'clock before he arrived. She couldn't just wait here in the garden until then. Could she go to the Andersons', her nearest neighbors, and phone the police? Could she walk that far?

She had to.

The home of Wilbur and Mildred Anderson was at least a quarter mile distant, by way of the narrow blacktop road that circled the lake. Four times she had to stop and rest when she feared another heart attack. Long before she reached her destination she was drenched with sweat and reeling from fatigue.

What--dear God--if there was no one home?

There almost wasn't. Wilbur and Mildred were out. But their maid opened the door and helped Leora to a sofa in the living room where she was able to lie down until her heart stopped thudding and her strength returned. Then she phoned the police, telling them who and where she was and what she had done.

In ten minutes a car with Patrolman DiCorsi in it was at the Andersons' door.

DiCorsi drove her home. When none of the many keys he had brought with him would open a door, he asked if he might break a window.

"If you must. But be careful of my cat. He doesn't take to strangers."

Using the butt of a gun, DiCorsi broke a bedroom window at the back of the house and, yes, Leora had been right in warning him about Anti. The cat must have come running when he heard the glass break, for when DiCorsi climbed inside he was greeted with the kind of screech Anti always voiced when the phone rang.

Leora called out loudly, "It's all right, Anti! He's a friend!"

The screeching stopped.

The policeman went through the house to the front door and opened it from the inside. He then helped Leora up the veranda steps and into the house, where she thanked him for his kindness, and he asked if there was anything more he could do for her.

"No," she said. "I'll be all right now. A friend is coming over later."

DiCorsi departed, and she went on into the living room where she found the phone and its cradle on the floor. Beside them sat Anti, balefully glaring at her.

Halting, she leaned on her crutches and glared back at him. "So you finally did it again," she said accusingly. "I wasn't here to stop you, and when it rang you attacked it. I knew you weren't cured."

Nor would he ever be, she told herself. From the time he'd been just a tiny ball of black fluff he had hated the sound of a ringing telephone. She had lost count of the times he had hurled himself at an offending phone and sent it flying.

"You're a very naughty cat," she told him now as she struggled to gather up phone and cradle from the carpet and return them to the table.

Then she thought of something and suddenly felt weak.

Who could have called her except the people who had been doing so all along? Of course, Tom Darcy might have called, but why should he when he had already told her he would be late this evening? And of course some other friend ... but the flow of calls from casual

friends following her heart attack had dwindled to a trickle now.

They must have phoned. And they must have heard the phone thud on the floor when Anti knocked it off the table. They must have thought she dropped it.

They'll think I've had another heart attack. And they'll be coming here to rob me, just as Tom said they would!

Terrified, she called the police for the second time that day. She told them what had happened and what she feared might happen next. Could they send someone to stay with her until Tom Darcy arrived?

They said they could, but were short-handed at the moment and it would take a little while. "We'll have a man there just as quick as we can, lady," the voice said. "Meantime, be sure your doors are locked."

"But there's a broken bedroom window! Mr. DiCorsi had to break it to get me in!"

"Lady, we'll do our very best, believe me. You won't be alone long."

That window. DiCorsi had climbed in without any difficulty, and the people who'd been phoning her could do the same. Trembling with fear now--actually shaking all over--she went into her bedroom for the shotgun Tom had left with her.

Would she remember how to use it if she had to? Yes, she would; she was sure of it. Anyway, hadn't Tom said all she had to do was point it in the direction of whatever was coming at her and pull the triggers? She could do that.

It was dark outside now, she noticed as she walked down the hall to the back bedroom. With the window out, the bedroom might be chilly for her. Perhaps she ought to station herself in the hall. With the door open she could still watch the window.

Resting the gun against the wall there, she went on into the bedroom for a chair to sit on. The room was chilly. A lively breeze came in through the shattered window, carrying flower scents from her beloved gardens and sounds of leaves rustling on the trees out there.

There was nothing wrong with her hearing, thank heaven, even if she was sixty-two years old and crippled.

Dragging the chair into the hall was no simple task when using crutches. She positioned it just outside the open door and at last, exhausted, sat down.

With, of course, the shotgun.

And waited.

Who would come first, the people whose phone call Anti had interrupted, or the police?

Ten minutes passed. It seemed an hour. Sensing a movement in the darkness of the hall behind her, she took in a sharp, quick breath and turned her head. But it was only Anti, coming to share the vigil with her. After rubbing himself against her left ankle, he simply sat down and stared into the bedroom, as though able to read her mind.

More than once she had convinced herself that Anti could do that.

"If anyone comes, you mustn't make a noise," she said. "They won't see us here in the dark, and I don't want them to know I'm sitting here."

Anti looked up at her, then stared at the window again.

The waiting continued.

She must have been there twenty minutes or more when she at last heard a car stop somewhere close by--in the road, perhaps, or even in her own driveway.

Was it the police?

It was not a police car--and had Leora Truesdale been able to see it from her sentry post she would have been even more terrified than she was.

The machine was a souped-up jalopy in psychedelic waves of color and driven by a barefoot young man

with a leer on his lips, a glint of evil in his eyes, and shoulder-length hair that almost hid the buttons of colored glass in his earlobes. His attire consisted of ragged blue jeans, and a black sweatshirt with a white death's-head painted on it.

On the jalopy's front seat with this youth were two more of his kind: an equally bizarre young man a year or so younger, and a young woman who could have been reasonably pretty had there been even a touch of color to relieve the fishbelly white of her face.

The car stopped in Leora's driveway and the three got out. The older young man grunted, "Wait," and climbed the veranda steps.

He tried the door and found it locked. He returned to the car. "Maybe she left a window open," he said. "If she din't, we'll hafta break one."

The girl with the fishbelly face whined, "Jeez, Slick, you sure about this? The heart failure?"

"Course we're sure!" said the second youth. "You heard her drop the phone, didn'ya?"

"But--"

"And didn' Slick say it'd happen that way? Like if we kep' callin' her and never said nothin', we'd scare her into havin' another heart attack? Huh? Didn' he say so?"

"Yeah, jeez, Danny. But--"

"Shut up, then, willya?"

"But how do we know she had a heart attack?" the girl wailed.

"Because she dropped the phone, for Crissake! Don' be so dumb!"

"An' because the house is dark," said the one named Slick, their leader. "If she was okay she'd have lights on, stupid. You think she'd be goin' 'round on crutches in the dark?" He glared at the others in disgust. "Are you comin' or not? I tole ya we hafta find a window."

They followed him through the darkness alongside the house. Step by slow step, with Danny behind him, the girl last. Reaching out, the girl touched Danny's arm.

"Danny--" A whisper. "Do you and Slick have to put it to her, like Slick said?"

"If she's still alive," he snarled over a shoulder. "Why shouldn' we?"

"She's old. The paper said she's sixty-two."

"She's built the same as you are, kid."

"Danny, all we need is to steal some stuff to buy supplies with. There's no need for you and Slick to--"

"Will you two shut up, for Crissakes?" their leader hissed. Then suddenly, "Hey, look! A busted window! We won't have to smash one."

"Why would she have a broken window?" the girl said.

"Who gives a damn why, for Crissakes? Go on back to the front door, both o' ya. I'll climb in here and open it for ya from inside."

The other two departed. Slick watched them go. Then he approached the window, jumped up, and grabbed the ledge, voicing a grunt of exertion as he hauled his muscular body up onto it.

On her chair in the hall, with Anti at her feet and the shotgun leaning within reach against the wall, Leora Truesdale heard the sounds of intrusion at the broken window. Before that she had heard voices outside in the dark, but had not been able to make out what they were saying.

Now she watched a dark human shape haul itself over the window ledge and drop on all fours to the floor inside. Saw it scramble from hands and knees to its feet and turn toward her. All she could see of it, really, was the white death's-head painted on its chest.

Telling herself she had to, Leora reached for the gun, but knew she would never pull the triggers. Let

them rob her if they wanted to. Looking down at Anti, she voiced a moan of helplessness.

At that moment the phone rang.

The small black cat, perhaps associating the phone's ringing with the disturbance at the window, did a predictable thing. Voicing his usual ear-splitting screech, he launched himself like a taloned rocket at the intruder.

Leora, at the same time, reached out to a lightswitch on the wall beside her, and the hall light went on.

But, unfortunately for Anti, the youth was armed.

Lashing out with one hand, he met the cat's charge with a long, gleaming blade that entered Anti's throat and came out his back. Leora's beloved pet uttered one last scream, this time of agony, while feebly clawing at its destroyer's knife hand.

Then the intruder disdainfully flicked the dying body to the floor and kicked it half way across the room before turning to advance on Leora again.

And with the hall light on, he saw her face.

What he saw was not the expression of terror he expected--not the one which, in fact, had been on her face before he killed her adored pet. He saw instead a fury that wholly convulsed her normally placid features. A fury that made him falter in his stride and drop the knife from limp fingers and blurt out in a blubbering voice, "No, lady! Oh, good Christ, no! Don't!"

But he was wasting his breath. Leora had lifted the double-barrel shotgun in both hands and taken careful aim. Now she squeezed both triggers, filling the bedroom and hall with twin blasts of thunder.

Dropping the weapon to the floor, she stood up then without her crutches and watched the intruder die. With half his head blown off, he did that very quickly.

Still without her crutches, Leora walked over to her adored cat and gathered him into her arms. Returning to her chair, she sat again. She was still sitting there with Anti on her lap, totally indifferent to the larger dead body in its pool of blood on the bedroom floor, when Patrolman DiCorsi arrived. And she was telling DiCorsi what had happened when Tom Darcy turned up, in caring panic because she had failed to answer his phone call.

The dead youth's companions had fled wildly on foot at the sound of the shotgun blasts, but were picked up the following morning . . . just about the time Leora Truesdale finished burying, in the prettiest part of her garden, the little black cat who hated the sound of telephones.

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on, and I think you will, perhaps we can forget this bad beginning and start afresh. Come, Lieutenant, let us have a smoke on it and forget that which is well forgotten. May I have a cigarette?"

But Hasselt, left arm hanging stiffly before him in a sling, only smiled. He slid his good hand in his pocket, drew out a small object.

"Sorry, Mynheer Kapitan," he replied. "I have no cigarettes . . . I'm smoking a pipe now."

# HELIOGRAPH

by Carl Jacobi

When the July quarterly supply transport reached Long Nawang after two grueling months up the Kayan River from Bulungan on the east coast, it brought Captain Van Rudin, the outpost's officer-in-charge, three things. It brought five tins of Sumatra tobacco, for which he had been in want no less than a week. It brought Lieutenant William Hasselt, and an official despatch from Samarinda headquarters. And in the eyes of Van Rudin both of the last two items were potential sources of trouble.

The despatch read:

H. Van Rudin, Captain Commanding
Long Nawang garrison--Apo Kayan
For your information:

You are hereby advised that a Chinese trader, one Liang Foy, who has been contracting Punan and Kenyah tribes near Long Iram, has penetrated into the interior by way of the Mahakam, and is now reported to be near the mouth of the Boh tributary.

Although this office has no definite information, it is suspected Liang Foy has contrived to bring a shipment of Russian rifles for sale to upriver tribes. This is a serious matter. You will investigate and report by return transport.

Major David de Cleyn

Van Rudin frowned as he finished reading. He scrawled a large "NOTED" across the paper in blue pencil and spiked it on the desk spindle. Then he leaned back, slowly relit his pipe and studied the man who stood waiting at attention before him.

Hasselt was a tall man with a thin, incisive face marked by a narrow mustache. His eyes were dark and clear. Though he wore river-travel shorts with shirt open at the throat, his entire bearing was one of immaculate efficiency.

"Major de Cleyn sent me here at my own request, sir," he began. "If you will allow me, I'll explain."

Van Rudin dismissed military formality by waving the newcomer to a chair. "Talk up, Mynheer Lieutenant," he replied somewhat stiffly. "We've a full house here with no one due to leave until after the monsoon. I'm damned if I can figure what this means."

Hasselt talked. He crossed his legs, hung his solar topi on one knee and began a rapid soliloquy in a low, well-modulated voice. For a quarter of an hour he spoke in precise, terse sentences. And at the end of that quarter hour, Van Rudin sat motionless, controlling his emotions with difficulty. A good part of what he had heard was vague to him. But he gathered this much:

That Lieutenant Hasselt was a graduate of the military college at Batavia. That previously the farthest he had been into the interior was Long Iram. And that the bug in his cranium had to do with heliograph. Heliograph!

Hasselt had brought with him in one of the transport prahus a large wooden box. In that box were four instruments, each comprised of a circular mirror, a shutter with a lever, and a telescopic rod. The Lieutenant had been authorized to establish a system of sun-signal-

ling at the Dutch Borneo outpost, Long Nawang.

It was a fact, wasn't it, that within a radius of twenty miles from the post there were no less than three large kampongs? And these native villages at irregular intervals broke into sudden rebellion, requiring an armed force to be in their vicinity at all times.

Very well. At each kampong a heliograph set would be located. The apparatus would be placed in the highest nearby tree. A Dyak soldier, who of course must learn the code, would be stationed at each set. Hasselt himself would operate the central set at Long Nawang. He would thus be in regular communication with the three villages, would be advised of all developments in them, while the total outlying force would be but three men.

"Of course," Hasselt went on quickly, "there is one disadvantage. Obviously when the sun is clouded the system cannot be used. But I think you'll agree that even during the rainy season, that is a minor angle. There is always some sunlight for an interval every day."

Van Rudin carefully knocked the ashes from his pipe, polished it on his uniform coat and stored it on a rack of some fourteen other briars on the bamboo wall at his side.

"The whole thing depends, I suppose," he said quietly, "on whether or not I decide to let you have a go at it."

Hasselt's face clouded for only an instant. Then, unmindful of the Captain's icy stare, he smiled and shook his head.

"Not exactly, sir. I have orders from Major de Cleyn to proceed according to my own judgment. But of course everything I do will be subject to your approval."

After that the Lieutenant offered news and gossip from Samarinda and Pontianak. When he found these were politely but coldly received by Van rudin, he saluted, picked up his luggage and began to follow a Dyak orderly to his assigned room in the near of the officers' bungalow. But before he left he took a cigarette from his pocket and lit it. It was a four-inch Russian cigarette, and it was perfumed.

For two years Van Rudin had been stationed at Long Nawang, surrounded by heat, treacherous Dyaks and partially explored jungle. During that time, overlord of a vast onderafdeeling (district) with only the flag of the queen to restrict him, he had come to resent all disruptions of his routine. He hated criticisms, suggestions as to the manner in which he governed the post. And he found almost his sole enjoyment in his pipes.

Tobacco with Van rudin was a matter of principle. He had once said that he could place a man instantly by the form of nicotine he used. Cigars and cheroots were for hairbrained swivel-chair sitters like de Cleyn. Chewing was intolerable and akin to the betel nut of the Dyaks. A cigareet was an object of suspicion. But a perfumed cigarette! Van Rudin choked as he thought of it and strode out into the compiund to begin the day's inspection.

Inspection over, he drew Lieutenant Bakster, second in command, onto the bungalow veranda and took up immediately the Liang Foy matter.

"We'll leave at dawn tomorrow," Van Rudin said, after showing Bakster the despatch from the C.O. "Just the two of us and four Dyak troopers to carry. It's a one-man job, but I need a change, and so do you. The villagers are quiet, and Vorst can take over while we're gone."

Bakster nodded. He was a short, heavy man who ahd served in two Atchinese campaigns in Sumatra. Like Van Rudin, he smoked a pipe.

"We should make it in eight days," he commented. "But how about Hasselt?"

Van Rudin grimaced and stroked

his jaw. "Hasselt is here in an engineering capacity only," he replied. "If I have anything to say about it, he'll go back with the transport."

There were a number of things to be done before Van Rudin felt he could leave the post. He questioned the medical officer, found that the three cases of fever were well under control and there was no danger of an epidemic. He carefully advised Lieutenant Vorst what to do in case of the slightest emergency. And he made a personal visit to the three kampongs. Eight days was a short time, but Van Rudin knew his responsibility.

It was night when he returned from the village-inspection trip. The Dyak boatmen pushed his dugout to the post jetty, slipped the painter around the bollards. Van Rudin climbed out, motioned them to the barracks. Then he moved slowly to the wharf end and leaned against one of the upright piles.

For half an hour he stood there alone. Under a mottled sky the black river drifted by him. He lit his pipe, watched the smoke coil upward from the square bowl.

"Heliograph," he muttered to himself. "What infernal nonsense."

And then abruptly he stiffened. Right hand dropping downward to his holstered army pistol, he stared ahead into the gloom. From somewhere on the dark water a sound had drifted to his ears. Low and muffled, Van Rudin recognized it as paddles near the farther shore.

Starlight came through an open patch of sky, and for a fleeting instant he saw. It was a large prahu, manned by ten or more Dyaks, and it was low in the water as if heavily laden. Moving sluggishly, it disappeared downriver.

Ten minutes snailed by. A second smaller prahu came into view. Like an elongated ghost it followed its predecessor.

Van Rudin stuck his pipe into his mouth and scowled. What were native boats doing on the river at night, coming from the south? A returning hunting party? But no. In such a case there would be yelling and singing, torches to announce their arrival.

Abruptly through the still air a new sound came to his ears. Faint, metallic, it was the distant ringing of a Dyak gong, one of those huge discs that hung before the longhouse of every kampong and were struck to ward off evil spirits.

The officer shrugged. Turning, he made his way past the sentry into the stockade and across to the bungalow. In his room he undressed slowly, lay down under the mosquito cloth. But he could not sleep. His brain was troubled. More than that, smoke was drifting into his room from Hasselt's quarters farther down the corridor . . . sweet smoke . . . from a perfumed cigarette.

At dawn the party got their equipment ready. Van Rudin's plans were simple. They would follow the Kayan to the narrows, head across country to the Boh, where a dugout was kept concealed for just such an occasion, then continue to the mouth and the Mahakam. Locating Liang Foy, if he were in the district, should be easy.

Yet an inner voice warned the Captain not to leave. He had an unpleasant premonition that trouble was stalking the post, that it would strike the moment he was beyond call.

Only the fact that the transport left in two weeks and his personal report must accompany it to the coast led him to act.

Four days later they came upon Liang Foy.

The slant-eyed Cantonese was seated in the stern of a weather-racked gasoline launch, and he proved disappointing. He knew nothing of rifles, Russian or otherwise. By the sacred ashes of his ancestors he would not think of selling them

to the Dyaks if he had them. He was just a poor trader who had come farther inland because the Mahakam was more navigable this year and business near the coast was bad.

Scowling, Van Rudin studied the yellow man, then rummaged through the launch and found nothing. With a sigh he gave the order to return.

And on the sixth day, forty-eight hours from the post, the drums began! A pulsing, rhythmic murmur at first, coming from the northeast, they grew louder, more distinct with each mile backtrail. Van Rudin cursed, urged the Dyaks to greater speed.

"Too late," Bakster panted as he worked at his own blade. "That dirty chink already sold his rifles. He must have gone up the Boh and met the natives at the headwaters. The Dyaks took the same trail we did, but they went at night. We're in for it."

Van Rudin nodded, thinking of the loaded prahus he had seen on the river. What a blind fool he had been.

But the trouble went deeper than that. Rifles the Dyaks might have, yet it was against their nature to put them to use at once without a reason. Hate for the garrison, strong as it was, was not sufficient motive. It required the frenzy of a rice feast, a significant omen, an infringement of a tabu law.

On and on the drums thundered. By the time the party had crossed the intervening jungle to the Kayan, the pounding vibration seemed to come from all sides. Paddling furiously, they reached the final bend in the river separating them from Long Nawang. They slowed, advanced with caution.

Ahead machine-gun fire rattled abruptly. Scattered rifle shots answered.

Lips tight, Van Rudin directed the boatmen to pull for shore. At the left bank they plunged into the bush. Single file they ran, weaving through the rank undergrowth.

For ten minutes they fought their way forward. The shots were nearer now, and between staccato bursts from the post's machine guns came short intermittent yells.

Van Rudin slid to a halt, turned, revolver in hand.

"They're attacking from the river bank," he said quietly. "We'll enter through the rear gate. As soon as we strike the clearing, Lieutenant, fire the signal to let Vorst know."

They penetrated the last fringe of growth, reached the edge of the glade. Thirty yards beyond reared the high wooden walls of the stockade. Puffs of smoke were billowing from the blockhouse.

Bakster jerked his revolver upward, fired three shots in quick succession, then followed Van Rudin across the open space at a racing gallop. The four Dyak troopers were already running for safety. Halfway they heard a bugle ring out, saw the stockade rear gate swing inward.

But before they reached it, five Kenyah warriors, grotesque in warpaint and feathered head-dresses, leaped from a clump of lalang grass, jerked rifles to shoulders and fired.

The Dyak private nearest Van Rudin stiffened and fell. Bakster clutched at his arm. A minute later the two white men and three natives were in the compound and the gate swung shut.

"Cease firing."

Van Rudin issued the order as he advanced to the side of Lieutenant Vorst, who stood by the bungalow steps, a worried look on his face.

"I'll take over," the Captain said. "Accompany Bakster to his quarters and see that his arm gets medical attention. How many men up there?" His hand pointed to the blockhouse.

"Seven, sir," Vorst answered, saluting jerkily.

The dry detonations of the rifles in the reeds were still sounding. Even as Van Rudin stood there in

a moment's indecision a burning spear lifted over the walls, sang through the air and dropped beside him. His nailed boots trampled on the flaming grass point, kicked the shaft aside.

He mounted the bamboo ladder to the blockhouse. Seven brown faces turned to meet him, grinning. Good men here. Vorst had picked the best. Three Long-Glats, three Bukats, who a scant year before had been hunting heads in the Kapuas district, and a tattooed Coast Dyak. The Long-Glats fondled the Hotchkiss guns lovingly, waiting for orders to resume firing.

Van Rudin peered out through one of the wall ports. Ahead and below him the silt-heavy river was a band of copper in the sun. Between it and the stockade lay a space of seventy-five yards, open and for the most part offering no protection. At the extreme right and left, however, where the clearing merged into the jungle, lalang grass and reeds grew man-high and unmolested. It was from these two sectors that the attacking shots came.

Bullets thudded into the blockhouse walls spasmodically. Sumpit blow-pipe darts whipped over the stockade to land quivering in the hard earth of the compound. But save for an uplifted arm, a gleaming rifle, the Kenyahs remained hidden.

Van Rudin packed his pipe thoughtfully, lit it and considered.

"Fire carefully when you see something to fire at," he said in Malay at length. "Rifles, unless they attempt to scale the walls."

The Kenyahs made one more concerted rush. Emerging from the lalang grass, a double line of them ran forward to the stockade. Their intent was obvious. The Hotchkiss guns took up their death chatter once again.

Five minutes later the clearing was swept clean. Silence closed in on the post.

That night after mess Van Rudin sat on the veranda and held court. Vorst, nervous and ill-at-ease, supplied the details.

"I'm not entirely to blame, Mynheer Kapitan," he began slowly. "The rifles started it. The Kenyahs must have smuggled them downriver more than a week ago. Two of the three kampongs are armed to the teeth.

"The day you left Hasselt got his heliograph sets in order. I warned him to wait until you returned, but he insisted he was operating under direct orders from Major de Cleyn. He placed a sun-signalling set at each village and one here in that tree in the center of the compound."

Vorst paused, studied his superior officer intently.

"Everything would have gone all right," he continued, "but the Kenyahs objected to those instruments. They refused to touch them, but they regarded them as some form of Dutch magic. Yesterday the trouble started. The patrol forces stationed at each kampong were ordered to leave on the threat of losing their heads, and the attack began this morning."

Van Rudin's face was granite. He looked out through the veranda screening at the single tree in the compound. High up in the top branches could be seen the shadowy outlines of the recently constructed platform which held the post's heliograph set. In his chair by the veranda railing Hasselt sat in strained silence.

And Van Rudin was thinking. Thinking what would happen if the three kampongs saw fit to unite and attack the post en masse. It would mean annihilation probably. Even machine guns and wooden walls couldn't hold them out forever. The whole affair went back to de Cleyn. Maybe now he would realize that green officers with brilliant ideas were all right on the coast but didn't belong at in-country outposts where the lives of forty men rested on shoestring diplomacy.

When Van Rudin finally spoke

it was in a low, firm voice.

"Tomorrow," he said, "two platoons will go downriver and bring back those heliograph sets. They're the immediate cause of the trouble, and taking them away may stop the rebellion. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Hasselt, I will appreciate it if you will remain in your quarters. What you did may not have constituted actual insubordination, but it is inconceivable that you should have acted without my consent. You will go back to Samarinda with the transport."

The words reached their mark. Hasselt pushed to his feet, swayed a moment and strode to the door. At the threshold he turned, fists clenched.

"By your orders, Mynheer," he said shortly. "But as man to man I think you're a stubborn fool."

The night remained quiet. Above the blockhouse the Dyak lookout chanted the Malay equivalent of "All's well" at intervals. The drums had ceased hours ago, but a crimson glow in the sky marked a fire in the nearest kampong.

Long after Bakster and Vorst had gone to their rooms, Van Rudin sat on the veranda, sweating profusely, chewing the stem of a cold pipe.

The situation seemed tightly closed from all angles. He couldn't take the Dyaks' rifles away from them now. Even at best that would be a matter of time and patient persuasion. And tomorrow when they went downriver it would be a question if any of them returned.

Hasselt was a meedling, insubordinate fool!

Van Rudin placed his pipe in his pocket and jerked forward to the edge of his chair. His brain, mulling over it all, had come upon a new thought. Why wait for the coming day? Slipping out of the post tonight with but a handful of men he might enter the three villages and return with the troublemaking heliograph sets before the natives realized what had happened.

Even as his mind decided, another thought followed. Hasselt had got them into this. Inexperienced or not, he would be the other white man to go. Van Rudin got up and strode into the bungalow.

An hour later a small dugout detached itself from the post jetty, swung into the current and moved downstream. Blurred shadows against the night sky, the five occupants sat stiff and unmoving, making no sound.

In the stern, eyes hard, Van Rudin trained his gaze past the three Dyak boatmen to the inky jungle shore. Ahead in the bow Hasselt squatted beside his rifle.

A screeching tree hyrax seemed to follow them along the left bank. Off somewhere a leopard snarled.

Van Rudin was still amazed at the ease with which they had left the post. Fully expecting to be ambushed before they reached the river, the two white men and three Dyak privates had passed through the clearing to the jetty without a shot fired. The Kenyahs were either leading them on, permitting them to move toward their own destruction, or for some unexplained reason they had made a temporary return to their villages.

Sighting a blacker shadow ahead, Van Rudin recognized the landing-place of the first kampong. They slid shoreward. The two white men made their way up the treacherous notched log and strode boldly toward the village.

A dying fire shone fitfully through the trees. Following the trail, they emerged into full view of the long-house. The huge structure, community house for many families, seemed deserted at first. But an instant later a surprised yell sounded, and the clearing leaped into a place of running figures, shouts and confusion.

The two white men advanced to

a huge Palapak tree close to the farther end of the long-house. Wooden pegs had been fastened at three-foot spaces on either side of the trunk. Hasselt braced himself and began to mount upward.

Revolver in hand, Van Rudin watched the space before him gradually close in. In two minutes he was faced by a muttering crowd of Kenyahs. Tattooed warriors, and their wives, naked children, the kapala himself and the witch doctor all formed a menacing semicircle before him. Parangs were drawn from bark loincloths. Rifles gleamed in the firelight.

And at the sight of those weapons Van Rudin narrowed his eyes. Not Russian rifles as he had expected, as he had been warned. But modern Lee Enfields, short magazine Mark VI improved type. Better guns than the Dutch service had. Liang Foy had done his job well. He had evidently crossed the border into Sarawak or British North and obtained contraband of British manufacture.

Above Hasselt reached the top branches of the tree. Came a succession of sharp blows and rending of wood. The Lieutenant began to descend.

On the ground once again with the heliograph instrument in his arms Hasselt nodded and led the way toward the river. They reached it without intervention. In the dugout the Dyak boatmen dipped their baddles, and they moved out into the river. Not until a bend in the jungle shore was passed, hiding them from sight, did Van Rudin realize the strain he had been under.

Forehead wet with sweat, throat dry, he grimly contemplated the fact that the ordeal must be endured twice more before they could hope for success. He admitted to himself that Hasselt had acted with nerve and courage, but any kindly feeling toward the Lieutenant was swept away a moment later by the younger man's action.

Hasselt lit another of his cigarettes. The perfumed smoke swirled over the dugout to enter Van Rudin's nostrils in a sickening cloud.

The second kampong lay on the south side of the river. As they followed the well-worn trail inland Van Rudin was oppressed by the silence that greeted them. He fingered his revolver nervously.

Entering the village, they stopped short. By some unknown means the Kenyahs had been warned of their approach. Twenty warriors faced them, spears raised, mutilated faces filled with hate and distrust.

When it happened Van Rudin was caught off guard. There was a guttural command. Stealthy steps sounded behind the two white men. Before they could turn naked figures surged upon them from the rear, and a rattan rope coiled through the air. A heavy glow from a wooden club crashed down on Hasselt's shoulder as he jerked his revolver upward.

Bound and helpless, the two white men were pushed forward to the fire. A Kenyah warrior spat at them, seized their weapons. And then the village kapala strode forward.

"White men," he said, speaking in Malay, "you have chosen to come here after we warned your patrol to leave. You have placed in our midst pieces of magic which we do not understand. Already in answer to the workings of that magic two of my wives have been taken sick and the child of another refuses to eat. The charm is potent, but it can be washed out in blood. Meraka, our wise one, has said so. You must die."

The words were spoken simply while the surrounding crowd looked on in silence. Van Rudin made no reply.

After that the two white men were led up the ladder to the gallery of the long-house, marched to the far end and pushed into a narrow chamber. The nipa-thatch door banged shut.

Hasselt flung himself down on the floor and spoke for the first time.

"Captured like children," he said bitterly. "Why didn't we put up a fight? A couple of shots, and that rabble would be running yet."

Van Rudin shook his head slowly. Light filtered through the crude wall from the fire outside to reveal his face set in grim lines.

"It wouldn't have been as easy as that," he answered. "Ten years ago, yes. But the Kenyahs have learned to understand firearms and know their limits. It's not ourselves that I'm worried about just now. It's the post."

"The post?"

Van Rudin nodded and squatted beside the Lieutenant. "Long Nawang can hold out as long as the villages attack separately," he said. "But if they unite I'm afraid it means slaughter, death to every man stationed there."

The hours dragged past. Without food, without water the two imprisoned men sought to quiet their nerves with sleep. But insects came through the walls in hordes, and the air in the unventilated room grew stifling. Not until dawn did Van Rudin move. Then, at a sudden burst of sounds outside, he leaped to the door, peered through a crevice and gave a groan of despair.

"Warriors and chiefs from the other two villages," he said shortly. "It's what I feared. They'll have a long palaver, and then the whole horde of them will head upriver. The post won't have a chance."

Hasselt bit his lip. "Is there no way out?" he asked. "Can't... can't we do anything?"

"If Vorst and Bakster could be warned, they could make a counterattack, strike before the Kenyahs had formed. The palaver will take a full day, and during that time their weapons are put aside. But --" and the Captain let his hands fall to his sides heavily--"they can't be warned. Even if we got out of this room we'd never be able to escape from the village alive."

Hasselt's gaze followed Van Rudin's out the crevice. A sudden gleam in his eyes, he turned.

"The heliograph tree," he said excitedly. "If I can get out on the roof without being seen I can reach that lower branch and climb to the top. There's a strong sun, and I can flash Long Nawang. I can tell them to come downriver full strength."

His voice stopped short while his eyes searched Van Rudin's anxiously. The post commandant shook his head.

"It wouldn't work. No one at the post would be expecting a signal. Even if they were, who is there to understand your code?"

But Hasselt, face set in determination, was already removing his shoes.

"We've got to take the chance," he said, standing up. "While you were gone on the Liang Foy trip I trained one Dyak private, Saja Baras, a smattering of the code. He's slow at it, but if I can establish contact I might be able to make him understand. I'm going to try."

Once more the Lieutenant peered through the crevice. Then, moving to the rear of the room, he raised his arms and grasped the heavy bamboo rafter overhead. With a lithe movement he swung his body upward. Balancing, he crawled to the roof's slanting edge. His bent fingers began to dig at the nipa thatching.

Twice Van Rudin parted his lips to call the Lieutenant back. Each time he clicked his teeth together and said nothing.

The opening in the roof was wide now, large enough to admit a man's body. Hasselt called back in a hoarse whisper:

"Do something to attract them to the other side of the longhouse."

Van Rudin nodded, hesitated. Cupping his hands to his mouth,

he advanced to the door, strained his throat muscles and gave a long, piercing cry. It was the cry of an enraged leopard, practiced in past years of hunting experience, and he repeated it twice, ending in a low, coughing snarl.

The sound had its effect. A sudden hush fell upon the village. Then, led by a younger warrior, there was a concerted rush to the far side of the kampong. Hasselt slid out the opening and ran lightly across the slanting roof.

Unobserved, he reached the tree. He began to mount upward. Presently he was out of sight.

The confusion aroused by the leopard cry passed on. Two Kenyahs entered the bush to search for the animal that seemed so near. The others returned to gather about the three chiefs.

And Van Rudin sweated in the half gloom that surrounded him. Nails biting into palms, he waited. The watch on his wrist ticked slowly. Minutes snailed into a quarter of an hour, and still that section of the tree which quartered his vision remained devoid of human life.

Then his muscles jerked taut. Before him whipcord-clad legs suddenly dropped into view. Hasselt leaped to the long-house roof and, arms extended to keep his balance, began to run toward the opening in the thatch.

Twenty feet he came on. Then a Kenyah warrior twisted his head about and uttered a shrill cry of warning.

"The white tuan escapes. Kill him. Kill him!"

In an instant the air was filled with shouts and imprecations. Hasselt, head down, ran faster. An arm was upraised below, and a glinting shaft streaked upward.

The spear caught the Lieutenant high in the shoulder. He stumbled, fell. Rolling side over side his body catapulted into space.

One instant, like a man in a dream, Van Rudin stood stiff and unmoving. Then he wheeled, lurched toward the door of the room. With a mad oath he flung himself at that barrier. The door splintered, crashed open.

He rushed out, ran the length of the gallery and leaped to the ground below. Silently he ground his fist into the first of the natives who rushed forward to stop him. Ten feet more he fought his way, arms working like pistons. Then a solid bastion of brown bodies closed in on him, and a club rose and fell.

The weight seemed to descend upon his skull gradually. Village, faces swirled backward in a circle of flaming colored lights. He felt the ground rise up to meet him.

Yet twice after that he fought to open his eyes. Each time he sank backward like a man in an opium stupor. He heard dimly, as from far off, confused sounds. . . . And then a long time later those sounds changed. There were rifle shots now and voices in his own tongue and . . . and the clear, ringing notes of . . . a bugle.

It was the night of the following day, and they sat on the veranda of the officers' bungalow at Long Nawang. Before them the compound was a sea of blackness. Van Rudin pressed a hand gently against his bandaged head and twisted in his chair.

"I was wrong, Lieutenant Hasselt," he said at length. "It will take time and explanation to the natives, but heliograph is here to stay. Vorst tells me we've taken over every last one of the contraband rifles. The villages will be quiet again in a week, and a full report incriminating Liang Foy is being sent with the transport to the coast."

The Captain stopped to cross his legs slowly. "As for you," he continued, "Long Nawang needs men of your calibre. If you stay

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# THE CURSE OF THE HOUSE

by Robert Bloch

"Did you ever hear of a haunted house?"

I nodded slowly.

"Well, this case is different. I'm not afraid of a haunted house. My problem is that there's a house haunting me."

I sat silent for a long moment, staring at Will Banks blankly. He in turn regarded me calmly, his long, thin face impassive, and his gray eyes shining quite rationally as they focussed at random on various objects about my office.

But a slight, almost imperceptible twitching of the lips indicated the undoubtedly hyper-neuraesthenic tendencies which his calm exterior hid. Nevertheless, I mused, the man had courage. Victims of hallucination and obsession are usually quite unstrung, and their schizoid tendencies generally are uncontrollably manifested. But Will Banks had guts. This thought came quickly, then was overmastered by curiosity regarding his statement: "There's a house haunting me."

He had said it so matter-of-factly, so calmly. Too calmly. If he had been hysterical about it, or melodramatic, then it would indicate that he realized his plight as a victim of an obsession and was trying to fight it. But this acceptance implied implicit faith in his delusion. A bad sign.

"Perhaps you'd better tell me the story from the beginning," I said, a bit nervous myself. "There is a story, I presume?"

Banks' face, all at once, displayed genuine agitation. One hand rose unconsciously to brush back his blond, straight hair from the perspiring forehead. His mouth twitched more perceptibly.

"There is a story, Doctor," he said. "It isn't an easy story for me to tell and it won't be an easy story for you to--to believe. But it's true. Good God," he burst out, "don't you understand? That's what makes it so awful. It's true."

I adopted a professional suavity as I ignored his emotion and offered him a cigarette. He held it in nervous fingers, without lighting it. His eyes sought mine imploringly.

"You aren't laughing at me, are you, Doctor? In your capacity"--(he could not bring himself to say "psychiatrist") "you must listen to a lot of things that sound peculiar. You do, don't you?"

I nodded, offering him a light. The first puff braced him.

"And Doctor, another thing. You fellows have some kind of medical oath, don't you? About violating confidences, and all that sort of thing? Because there are certain--"

"Tell your story, Mr. Banks," I said briskly. "I promise you that I'll do what I can to help, but in order to help you I must have absolute sincerity from you."

Will Banks spoke.

"I told you that I'm haunted by a house. Well, that's true, strange as it may sound. But the circumstances are stranger still. To begin with, I'm going to ask you to believe in witchcraft. Get that, Doctor? I'm going to ask you to believe. I'm not arguing with you to convince you, although I think that can be done. I'm merely asking you. That in itself should convince you of my sincerity

and my sanity. Unless I miss my guess, the sure indication of a psychotic personality is when the deluded puts up a long, fantastic argument to convince his hearer. Am I right?"

I nodded. It was true.

"Well, I'm merely asking you to believe in witchcraft for the duration of my tale. Just as I believed, years ago, when I went to Edinburgh. I had been a student of the lost sciences men choose to call the Black Arts. I was interested in the use ancient sorcerers made of mathematical symbols in their ceremonies--surmising that perhaps they were unconsciously employing geometric patterns which hold keys to the outer cosmos, even the Fourth Dimension recognized by modern-day scientists.

"I spent years in the fascinating pursuit of olden devil-worship, traveling to Naples, Prague, Budapest, Cologne. I shall not say what I came to believe, nor shall I di more than hint at the survival of demon-worship in the modern world. Enough that after a time I established connections with the vast underground system controlling hidden cults. I learned codes, signals, mysteries. I was accepted. And material for my monograph was being piled up.

"Then I went to Edinburgh--Edinburgh, where once all men believed in witchcraft. Talk about New England witch-baiters! That's childish stuff compared to the Scottish town where not twenty or thirty old hags, but thirty thousand witches and sorcerers once lived and lurked. Think of it; three hundred years ago there were thirty thousand of them, meeting in old houses, creeping through underground tunnels in which lay buried the black secrets of their blood cults. Macbeth and Tam O'Shanter hint of it, but vaguely.

"Here in ancient Edinburgh I hoped to find the final corroboration for my theories. Here in the veritable witches' cauldron of wizardry, I settled and began to investigate. My underground connections served me, and after a time I was admitted to certain houses. In them I met people who still live a secret life of their own under the very surface of a quiet, modern Scottish city. Some of those dwellings are many hundreds of years old--still in use--some in use from below. No, I won't explain that.

"Then I met Brian Droome. 'Black Brian' Droome he was called, and in the coven he had another name. He was a gigantic man, bearded and swarthy. When we met I was reminded of descriptions concerning Gilles de Rais--reminded in more ways than one. Indeed, he did have French blood, though his ancestors had settled in Edinburgh hundreds of years ago. They had built Brian's house, and it was this house that I particularly wanted to see.

"For Brian Droome's ancestors had been sorcerers. I knew that. In the infamous secret history of European cults, the clan of Droome occupied a detestable eminence. During the great witchcraft craze of three hundred years ago, when the king's soldiers came seeking the burrows in which the wizards lay hidden, Droome House was one of the first to be ransacked.

"For the Droomes presided over a truly terrible cult, and in their great cellars fully thirty members of the family died before the muskets of the outraged militia. And yet the house itself had survived. While thousands of ransacked dwellings had burned in those terrible nights, Droome House had been left gaunt and deserted, but untouched. Some of the Droomes escaped.

"Those surviving Droomes returned. The worship went on, but in secret now; the Droomes were a devout race, not easily moved to abandon their religious tenets. The house stood, and the Faith stood. Until this day.

"But now only Brian Droome re-

mained, of all the line. He lived alone in the old house, a reputed student of sorcery who seldom attended the gatherings out on the hills where surviving believers still invoked the Black Father. My connections secured me an introduction, for I was greatly desirous of seeing the ancient dwelling and looking at certain inscriptions and designs which legend said were engraved on the stony walls of the cellars.

"Brian Droome. Swarthy, bearded, burning-eyed! Unforgettable! His personality was as compelling as a serpent's--and as evil. Generations had moulded him into the epitome of a sorcerer, a wizard, a seeker after things forbidden. The heritage of four hundred years had made a wizard of Droome.

"In boyhood he read the black books in his old house; in manhood he walked the shadows of its halls in a palpable atmosphere of witchery. And yet, he was not a silent man, he could talk a blue streak, and was remarkably well-informed and well-educated--in a word, cultured. But he was not civilized. Brian Droome was a pagan, and when he spoke of his beliefs he had the trusting manner of a fearless child.

"I met him several times at--gatherings. Then I requested the pleasure of visiting him at his home. I had to wheedle, I admit, because he was damnably reluctant. On the excuse of showing him certain notes of my own, I at last obtained his gruding consent. Others expressed genuine amazement when I told them; it seems that Droome had never allowed strangers in the great house, and was alone in the sense that he entertained no human company.

"So I called on Brian Droome. When I went, as I told you, I believed in witchcraft; believed, that is, that the art had been practised and had a scientific basis--although I did not concede that its achievements were in any way connected with the supernatural.

"But when I came in sight of the House of Droome, I began to change my mind. I didn't realize the full extent of the change until later, but even at the time the first glimpse of Brian Droome's dwelling filled me--filled me--with horror!"

The last words seemed to explode out of Will Banks. He went on, more softly than before.

"Now you must mark this. The house stood on a hillside against the bleeding sunset sky. It was a two-story house, with twin gables on either side of a peaked roof. The house rose out of the hill, like a gigantic head emerging from a grave. The gables were horns against the heavens. Two jutting eaves were ears. The door was wide as a grinning mouth. There was an upper window on each side of the door.

"I won't tell you that the windows were like eyes. They were eyes. Through their narrow slits they peered at me, watched me approach. I felt it as I have never felt anything before--that this house, this centuried dwelling, possessed a life of its own; that it was aware of me, saw me, heard me coming.

"I walked up the path, nonetheless, because I didn't know what was to come. I walked up and the mouth opened--I mean, the door opened--and Brian let me in. It opened, I tell you. Brian didn't open it. That was awful.

"It was just as though I had walked into a monster's head; a thinking monster's head. I could almost feel the brain buzzing about me, pulsing with thoughts as black as the shadows in the long, narrow, throat-like hallway through which we walked.

"Bear with me while I give a few details. There was a long hall, with a stairway at the further end, branching off into side rooms. The first side room to the left was

the study Brian took me to. How well I know the geography of that house! Why shouldn't I know it? I see it every night in my dreams.

"We talked. Of course it's important to remember what we talked about, but I really cannot recall. Brian, immensely forceful personality though he was, paled into insignificance beside the weight exerted by that ghastly house. If Brian Droome was the product of twelve generations, then this house was the twelve generations incarnate.

"It was something that had stood for three hundred and eighty years, filled with life all that time. Filled with evil life, filled with weird experiments, mad cries, hoarse prayers, and still hoarser answers. Hundreds of feet had trod its floors, hundreds of visitors had come and departed. Some, many in fact, had not departed. And of those, legend said that some had not been men. Blood had run in a slow, throbbing stream.

"And the house--not Brian Droome but the house--was an aged person who had seen all of birth and life and death and what lay beyond. Here was the real wizard, the true viewer of all secrets. This house had seen it all. It lived, it leered down from the hill.

"While Brian talked and I automatically replied, I kept thinking of the house. This great study, a monstrous room, filled with massive bookcases and long tables burdened with excess tomes; this great study with its olden oak furniture, suddenly seemed in my mind's eye to be stripped of all extraneous objects. It became an empty room again--just a vast wooden expanse with huge timbers that formed the rafters overhead.

"I imagined it like that, dusty and deserted, robbed of all signs of visible habitation. Still that damnable impression of life remained. An empty room here was never empty. The thought agitated me.

"It agitated me so much that I had to talk about it to Brian Droome. He smiled, slowly, as I described my sensations. Then he spoke.

"'It is a much older house than even you imagine,' he said in his deep burring voice. 'I who have dwelt here all my life still do not know what further secrets it may possess. It was built originally by Cornac Droome, in 1561. You may be interested in knowing that at this time the hill on which it stood supported several Druidic stones, originally part of the circle-pattern.

"'Some of these were laid in the foundations. Others still stand in the upper cellar. And another thing, my dear Banks--this house was not built, it accumulated.

"'It was reared upward for two stories, that is true. The gables and eaves and roof were then as they are now, and the second floor remains unchanged. But the house had once only a single cellar. It was not until the Faith prospered that we built again. And we built downward.

"'We built downward, I say. Just as a church spire rears toward Heaven, we of the Faith appropriately builded toward our own Kingdom. First a second cellar, and then a third; finally passages under the hill for secret goings-forth when under duress.

"'When Droome House was entered, the King's men never discovered the lower cellars, and that was well, for they would not have liked what they saw, being unbelievers and sacrilegious. Since then we have been wary of visitors, and the covens no longer meet; the lower cellars have fallen into disuse. Still, we have held many private ceremonies, for the Droomes had secret pacts of their own requiring certain regular rites. But in the past three hundred years we and Droome House have lived together in solitude.'"

Will Banks paused, drew breath. His lips twitched, he went on:

"I listened eagerly to his admissions concerning the cellars which I so desired to inspect. But something of his discourse puzzled me--his use of the word 'we' interchangeably, so that at times it meant the family, at times himself, and at other times it actually seemed to imply the very house!

"He arose and stood by the wall, and I noted how his fingers softly caressed the ancient wood. It was not the caress of a connoisseur handling a rare tapestry, not the caress a master bestows upon a dog. It was the caress of a lover--the soft stroking motion of understanding and concealed desire.

"'This old house and I understand one another,' Droome burred. His smile held no humor. 'We take care of one another, even though today we are alone. Droome House protects me even as I guard the secrets of Droome House.' He stroked the woodwork gently."

Banks paused again, swallowing hard before continuing. "By this time a revulsion had set in. Either I was mad, or Brian Droome was. I wanted my information and then I wanted to get out. I wanted to get out, I realized, because I never wanted to see this house again. I never wanted even to think about it again. And it wasn't the well-known fear of enclosed places--It wasn't claustrophobia, Doctor. I just couldn't stand the place, or rather, the unnatural thoughts it aroused. But a stubbornness was in my soul. I did not want to leave without the information I had come for.

"I rather bungled things because of the unreasoning panic I felt, the unreasoning panic that rose in my heart as he lighted candles in the gray room and peopled the house with walking shadows. I asked him almost point-blank if I could visit the cellars. I told him why, told him about inspecting certain symbols on the walls. He was standing by a candelabrum on the wall, lighting the waxen taper. As it flared up, a corresponding flare flamed in his eyes.

"'No, Will Banks,' he said. 'You cannot see the cellars of Droome House.'

"Just that and nothing more. The glare, and the flat refusal. He gave no reason, he did not hint of mysteries I had no right to know, he did not threaten harm should I insist. No, not Brian Droome. But the house--the house did! The house hinted. The house threatened. The shadows seemed to coalesce on the walls, and a gathering oppression fell upon me, seized me in impalpable tentacles that strangled the soul. I cannot express it save in this melodramatic wise--the house hated me.

"I was silent. I did not ask again. Brian Droome tugged at his black beard. His smile signified that the incident was closed.

"'You'll be going soon,' he said. 'Before that, a drink with me to stay your journey.'

"He walked out of the room to prepare the drink. Then a mad impulse seized me. Yet the impulse had reasons behind it. After all, I had come to Edinburgh solely for this end. For years I had studied, and here lay a clue I sorely needed. It was my only chance of obtaining the information I desired, and if the inscriptions were what I fancied, I could jot them down in a notebook in a moment. This was the first reason.

"The second was more complicated. The house--it threatened me. Like a mouse in the grip of a cat, I knew my doom but could not keep still. I had to squirm, wriggle. Once deprived of Droome's company, even for a moment, panic gripped me like that cat, pouncing on the helpless mouse. I felt as though eyes were watching me, invisible claws extending on every hand. I was unable to remain in this room, I had to move. Of course I could have followed Brian Droome, but

the other reason impelled me.

"I determined to enter the cellar. I rose quietly, on tiptoe, went down the hall. It was dark and still. Now don't misunderstand. It wasn't haunted. This was not a mystery-thriller mansion, with cobwebs and bats and creaking noises. It was merely dark, and the dark was old. Light hadn't shone here for three hundred years, nor sane laughter broken the stillness. It was darkness that should have been dead, but it was alive. And it oppressed and terrified a thousand times more than the sight of a ghost.

"I found myself trembling when I located the cellar door with the steps below. The candle I had slipped into my pocket before leaving the study came into my hands, wet with sweat from my palms. I lit it and descended the stairs. I left the house's head and entered its heart.

"I'll be brief here. The cellar was huge and there were many rooms, yet there was no dust. I won't go any further to describe the signs of life. There was a chapel and long walls with the symbols I sought, and an altar that undoubtedly must have been one of the Druid stones Brian referred to.

"But I didn't notice that. I never did see what I came to see. Because in the second chapel room I kept looking at the rafters. The long brown beams overhead against the cellar roof. The long brown beams with the great hooks on them. The great steel hooks. The great steel hooks that held dangling things! White, dangling things! Human skeletons!

"Human skeletons that gleamed as they hung in the breeze from the opened door. Human skeletons still so new as to remain hanging articulated. New skeletons on hooks on the long brown rafters.

"There was blood on the floor and strips of flesh, and on the altar a thing still lay--not cleanly stripped--yet. There was a vacant hook waiting, but the thing lay there on the altar before the black statue of Satan.

"And I thought of Brian Droome's mention of private rites still carried on by his family. I thought of his reticence concerning guests, and his refusal to allow me entrance to the cellar. I thought of the further cellars tha lay below; if this were the heart of the house what might lie beyond in the soul?

"Then I looked back at the dancing skeletons that trod the air with bony feet and swung their gleaming arms as they grinned down on me in mockery. They hung on the rafters of the House of Droome, and the House of Droome guarded them as one guards a secret.

"The House of Droome was with me in the cellar, watching me, waiting for my reaction. I dared not show it, I stood there, in fancy feeling forces quiver about me. Forces radiating from the blood-stained walls. Forces bursting from the outlandish designs cut in the stones. Forces rising from the floor, from depths still further below.

"Then I felt human eyes. Brian Droome stood in the doorway."

Banks was now on his feet. His eyes were staring. He was reliving the scene.

"I threw the candle and struck him in the face with the burning end. Then I snatched up the unmentionable basin from the altar top and I hurled it at his head. He went down. I was upon him then, desperately tearing at his throat. I had to act first, because when he had stood there in the doorway I had seen the knife in his hand. A cutting-knife, a sawing-knife. And I remembered the thing still lying on the altar. That was why I moved first, and now I was wrestling with him on the stone floor, trying to wrest the knife away. I was no match for him.

"He was a giant and he picked me up and carried me to the center

of the room, carried me toward the vacant hook that gleamed in the line of skeletons. Its steel barb projected outward, and I knew he meant to hang me there. My hands fought for that knife as he forced me down that grinning line of eyeless watchers. He lifted me high, until my head was on a level with his own madly distorted face.

"Then my hands found his wrist. Desperation gave my strength. I drove his wrenched arm back, upward. The knife entered his belly in one great thrust. The force spun him around and he fell back. His own neck caught against the steel hook hanging from the rafter. As his great arms released me he was pinioned. Blood gushed from his corded throat as I plunged the knife home again and again.

"He died there, on the hook, and he mumbled, 'The Curse of my House upon you.' I heard the curse through red hazes of madness. It was not dramatically impressed on my mind--then. Instead, there was only the gnawing horror of our struggle and his death; the fear which caused me to race up those steps without turning back, grope through darkness to the study--and set fire to the house.

"Yes, I burned Droome House, as one burns a witch or warlock; as they destroyed wizards in the olden days. I burned Droome House so that fire might purify and flame consume the evil that leaped at me as I ran out of the blazing dwelling. I swear the flames nearly trapped me as I ran, although they had only risen a moment before. I swear I clawed at the door as though it were a living thing that grappled with me, seeking to hold me back.

"Only when I stood below the hill and watched the red glow arise did I remember Brian's words. 'The Curse of my House upon you.' I thought of them as the door broke into a gash of scarlet flame, and when the people came and clustered about I still remained, heedless of danger, until I saw the walls of that accursed mansion crumble into glowing ash, and the place of evil destroyed forever. Then I knew peace, for a while.

"But now--Doctor--I'm haunted."

Will Banks' voice became a whisper.

"I left Edinburgh at once, dropped my studies. I had to, of course. Fortunately I was not incriminated in the affair, but my nerves had been shattered. I was on the verge of a true psychotic condition. I was advised to travel, regain my health and strength to fortify my mental outlook. So I traveled.

"In England I saw it first. I was spending a week with friends at Manchester; they had a country place just outside the industrial town. We rode about the estate one afternoon and I lagged behind to rest my horse. It was about sunset when I rounded a bend and saw the hill. The sky was red above it.

"I saw the hill first. And then, something grew on it. It grew. You've read about ghosts, Doctor? About how they manifest themselves with ectoplasm? They say it's like watching a picture come out in the solution in which a print is developed. It comes gradually, takes shape. The colors fill in.

"It was the house that did that! Droome House! Slowly, wavering lines grew solid as I recognized the damnable head that leered out of the hillside. The window-eyes were red with slanted sunlight, and they looked straight at me. 'Come in, Will Banks,' they invited. I stared for a full minute, blinking and hoping with all my heart that the vision would go away. It didn't.

"Then I spurred my horse to a gallop and fled down the road to my friends, never looking back.

"'Who lives on the hill?' I gasped. Jessens, the banker friend I was staying with, gave me a look.

Even before he spoke, I knew. 'No one,' he said. 'Trying to pull my leg, are you?'

"I kept still. But I left the next day. Went to the Alps. No, I didn't see the Droome House on the Matterhorn. I had a good solid six months of peace. But on the train back to Marseilles I looked out of the window at sunset and--there it was. 'Come in, Will Banks,' the eyes invited. I turned away. That same night I went to Naples.

"After that it was a race. For six months, eight months at a time I seemed safe. But if sunset found me near a hillside, be it in Norway or Burma, the damned vision re-occurred. I've put it all down. Twenty-one times in the past ten years.

"I grew clever enough about it all. After the third or fourth manifestation I realized that this combination of sunset and hillside was necessary to produce the image--for ghost I would not admit it was. I avoided being out in the open after dusk began. But in the last year or so, I've grown more hopeless.

"Travel has proved fruitless. I cannot escape it. Naturally, the story has remained with me alone. I dared not tell anyone, and several occasions served to convince me that nobody saw the apparition save myself. What has frightened me is the later developments of the thing.

"Now, when I force myself to gaze steadily at the house, I see it for a longer and longer time. And each time--this in the last three years, I have finally computed--that house appears nearer and nearer to the spot where I am standing.

"Don't you understand what it means? Sooner or later I shall be before the house, at the very door! And one sunset I may find myself inside! Inside, under the long brown rafters with the hooks, and Brian all bloody and the house waiting for me. Nearer and nearer. Yet God knows I'm always on the road when I see it up there on the hill. But I get closer to it every time, and if I enter that place of ghosts I know something waits for me; the spirit of that house--"

Will Banks did not stop of his own accord--I stopped him.

"Shut up!" I rapped sharply.

"What?"

"Shut up!" I repeated. "Now listen to me, Will Banks. I've listened to you, and I haven't commented; I expect the same courtesy in return."

He calmed down at once, as I knew he would--I was not a psychiatirst for nothing, and psychiatrists know when to let their patients talk and when to shut them up.

"I've listened to you," I said, "without any gibes about witchcraft or fantasies. Now suppose you listen to my theories with the same respect. To begin with, you're suffering from a common obsession. Nothing serious, just a common, everyday obsession--a cousin to the one that makes a habitual drunkard see pink elephants even when not actually suffering from delirium tremens."

Banks bridled. I stared him down.

"It's undoubtedly a symptom of a guilt-complex," I said matter-of-factly. "You killed a man named Brian Droome. Don't bother to deny it. We'll admit it. We won't go into the motives, we won't even examine justification. You killed Brian Droome under very peculiar circumstances. Something about the house in which the deed occurred was strongly impressed upon your susceptible subconscious mind. In a state of tension following the killing, you fired the house. In your subconscious, the destruction of the house loomed as a greater crime than the destruction of the man. Right?"

"It did, Doctor--it did!" Banks wailed. "The house had a life of its own, a concentrated life that

was greater than that of a single person. That house was Brian Droome, and all his wizard ancestors. It was Evil, and I destroyed it. Now it seeks vengeance."

"Wait a minute," I drawled. "Wait --a--minute. You're not telling me, I'm telling you. All right. In consequence of your guilty feelings this complex has arisen. This hallucination is a mental projection of your own guilt; a symptom of the weight you felt while keeping the story a secret.

"Understand? In psychoanalysis we have come to refer to confession as a cathartic method whereby the patient is often relieved of mental difficulties by merely telling frankly the story of his troubles. Confession is good for the soul.

"It may be that all of your problem has been solved by simply unburdening yourself to me here. If not, I shall endeavor to probe more deeply. There are some things I wish to learn regarding your association with witchcraft cults; I will need to find out certain details of your mental attitude regarding superstitions and the like."

"Don't you see?" Banks muttered. "You can't understand. This is real. You must know the supernatural as I do--"

"There is no supernatural," I stated. "There is merely the natural. If one speaks of supernatural one might as well speak of the subnatural, a manifest absurdity. Extensions of physical laws I grant, but such things merely occur in a disordered brain."

"I don't care what you believe," Banks said. "Help me, Doctor, only help me. I can't bear it much longer. Believe that. I would never have come to you otherwise. Even drugs won't keep me from dreaming. Wherever I go I see that cursed house rising up out of hills, grinning at me and beckoning. It gets nearer and nearer. Last week I saw it here--in America. Four hundred years ago it rose in Edinburgh; I burnt it ten years ago. Last week I saw it. Very close. I was only fifteen feet away from the door, and the door was open. Help me, Doctor--you must!"

"I will. Pack your things, Banks. You are I are going fishing."

"What?"

"You heard me. Be ready at noon tomorrow. I'll bring the car around. I have a little lodge up in the Berkshires, and we can put in a week or so of loafing around. Meanwhile I'll get a slant at you. You'll have to co-operate, of course --but we'll discuss those details later. Here now, just do as I say. And I think if you try a tablespoonful of this in some brandy tonight before you go to bed you won't have any more house-parties in your dreams. Noon tomorrow, then. Goodby."

It was noon the next day. Banks wore a gray suit and a nervous frown. He didn't feel like talking, that was evident. I chatted gayly, laughed a lot at my own stories, and swung the car up through the hills all afternoon.

I had it all planned out in my own mind, of course. The first notes on the case were down. I'd handle him easily the next few days, watch him for betraying signs, and then really get to work from the analytical side. Today I could afford to put him at ease.

We drove on, Banks sitting silent until the shadows came.

"Stop the car."

"Eh?"

"Stop it--it's getting toward sunset."

I drove on, unheeding. He shouted. He threatened. I hummed. The redness deepened in the west. Then he began to plead.

"Please stop. I don't want to see it. Go back. Go back--there's a town we just passed. Let's stay there. Please. I can't bear to see it again. Close! Doctor, for God's sake--"

"We'll arrive in half an hour," I said. "Don't be a child. I'm

with you."

I piloted the car between the green borders of the encircling hills. We headed west against the fading sun. It shone redly on our faces, but Banks was white as a sheet beneath its glare as he cowered in the seat beside me. He mumbled under his breath. All at once his body tensed and his fingers dug into my shoulder with maniacal strength.

"Stop the car!" he screamed.

I applied the brakes. He was cracking.

"There it is!" he yelled, with something that was almost triumph in his voice. Something masochistic, as though he welcomed the ordeal to come. "There's the house, on that hill. Do you see it? There!"

Of course it was just a bare hillside, some fifty feet back from the road.

"It's grinning!" he cried. "Droome is watching me. Look at the windows. They wait for me."

I watched him closely as he moved out of the car. Should I stop him? No, of course not. Perhaps if he went through with it this time he'd throw off his obsession. At any rate, if I could observe the incident I might get the clues necessary to unraveling the threads of his twisted personality. Let him go.

It was awful to watch, I admit it. He was screaming about the "House of Droome" and the "Curse" as he went up the hillside. Then I noticed that he was sleep-walking. Self-hypnotized.

In other words, Banks didn't know he was moving. He thought he was still in the car. That explained his story of how each time the imaginary house seemed closer. He unconsciously approached the focal point of his hallucination, that was all. Like an automaton he strained up the green glade.

"I'm at the door," he shouted. "It's close--God, Doctor--it's close. The damned thing is creeping toward me, and the door is open. What shall I do?"

"Go inside," I called. I wasn't sure he could hear me in his state, but he did. I counted on such an action to break the thread for him; watched his reactions carefully.

His tall form was silhouetted against the sunset as he walked. And now one hand reached out, his feet rose as though crossing an actual threshold. It was--I admit it--horrible to watch. It was the grotesque pantomime beneath a scarlet sky, the mimicry of a madman.

"I'm inside now. Inside!" Banks' voice rose with fear. "I can feel the house all around me. Alive. I can--see it!"

Without knowing it, I too, compelled by a fear I could not name, had left the car. I started for the hill. "Stay with it, Banks," I called. "I'm coming."

"The hall is dusty," Banks mumbled. "Dusty. It would be after ten years of desertion. Ten years ago it burned. The hall is dusty. I must see the study."

As I watched in revulsion, Banks walked precisely along the hilltop, turned as though in a doorway, and entered--yes, I said entered--something that wasn't there.

"I'm here," he muttered. "It's the same. But it's dark. It's too dark. And I can feel the house. I want to get out." He turned again and made an exit.

"It won't let me go!"

That scream sent me scrambling up the hillside.

"I can't find the door now. I can't find it, I tell you! It's locked me in! I can't get out--the House won't let me. I must see the cellar first, it says. It says I must see the cellar."

He turned and walked precisely, sickeningly. Around a bend. A hand opened an imaginary door. And then--did you ever see a man walk down non-existent stairs? I did. It halted me on my charge up the hillside. Will Banks stood on the hill at sunset walking down cellar stairs that were not there. And

then he began to shriek.

"I'm here in the cellar, and the long brown beams are still overhead. They are here, too. They are hanging, grinning. And why--it's you, Brian. On the hook. On the hook where you died. You're still bleeding, Brian Droome, after all these years. Still bleeding on the floor. Mustn't step in the blood. Blood. Why are you smiling at me, Brian? You are smiling, aren't you? But then--you must be alive. You can't be. I killed you. I burned this house. You can't be alive and--the house can't be alive. What are you going to do?"

I had to get up the hill. I couldn't stand hearing him shriek such things into the empty air. I had to stop him, now!

"Brian!" he shrieked. "You're getting down off the hook! No--the beam is falling. The house--I must run--where are the cellar steps? Where are they? Don't touch me, Brian--the beam fell down and you're free, but keep away from me. I must find the steps. Where are they? The house is moving. No--it's crumbling!"

I made the top of the hill, panting. Banks screamed on, and then his hands went out.

"God! The house is falling--it's falling on me. Help! Let me out! The things on the brown beams are holding me--let me out! The beams are falling--help--let me out!"

Suddenly, just before my outstretched hands could reach him, Banks flung up his arms as though to ward off an impending blow, then crumpled to the grass.

I knelt at his side. Of course I did not enter a house to do it. It was under the dying sun that I gazed into his pain-contorted face and saw that he was dead. It was under a dying sun that I lifted the body of Will Banks and saw--that his chest had been crushed as though by a falling beam.

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# MURDER IN SILHOUETTE

by Manly Wade Wellman

Datchett knocked on the door of Apartment 3-G. A muscle-ridged man of middle size opened cautiously. Over his shoulder Datchett could see a handsome, curvy blonde woman and a puffy, bright-eyed man.

"Somebody by the name of Ray Tyrone phoned my agency for a bodyguard," said Datchett.

"I'm Ray Tyrone," said the puffy man. "Come in."

Datchett came in. He was lean and long and his nose had been twice broken. "I've seen or heard your name somewhere, Mr. Tyrone," he said.

"Sure you have," said the muscular one. "You've seen it at the front of a hundred pictures. Ray used to be top cameraman for Nonpareil Pictures out Hollywood way."

"This is my wife," introduced Tyrone, indicating the blonde. "She was a featured player before our marriage. Her picture name's Minna Gordon."

Datchett nodded to her and looked inquiringly toward the man with muscles.

"And this is Joe Beard," Tyrone continued the introductions. "He used to be a middleweight wrestler, and lately he was a stunt man and bit-player for Nonpareil."

"Where does he fit in?" asked Datchett.

"I fit in all right," said Beard. "I'm Ray's partner, ain't I, Ray?"

"I guess so," said Tyrone without enthusiasm.

Datchett spoke to the camerman. "Did my boss tell you his terms?"

"Yes. Fifty dollars, in advance." Tyrone held out some bills. Datchett counted them and put them away.

"Okay," he said. "My name's Datchett, Jess Datchett. Now then, what are you folks doing so far away from your moving pictures?"

"We're hiding," said the blonde, Minna Gordon.

"From what?"

"Just hiding," smiled Beard. "We've paid you, detective. Isn't that enough?"

"No," replied Datchett, "it is not." He took the wad of money out of his pocket, tossed it on the table and started to go.

"Hey!" called Tyrone. "Stick around, we need you."

"You'd better say what for."

"Oh, give him the yarn, Ray," yawned Beard. "It might brighten his life."

Tyrone sucked his lips nervously. "Ever hear of Sigrid Holgar?" he asked.

"The Swedish movie star?"

"Right," said Beard. "The biggest lure Nonpareil can furnish."

Tyrone continued. "Holgar acts kind of shy and distant. Part of her ballyhoo, you know. Well, one day I took my camera up to her place. I knew she takes sun-baths in the back yard, inside a high hedge. Just for a gag I sneaked up and took a bunch of shots. They were swell." He grinned feebly. "Fifteen minutes of the most glamorous woman in the known world, lolling around and doing exercises without a stitch on. How'd you like to see them?"

"Not a bit," said Datchett. "But this doesn't sound like a bodyguard job to me."

"Wait till I finish. About a week or so later came a big shakeup. Nonpareil set me out on the widewalk. I needed dough--bad. So I sent word to the studio about

that Holgar sun-bath film. Offered to sell it for two hundred thou. They sent me this."

He fished out a wallet and took from it a folded letter. Datchett spread it out. It had a Nonpareil Studios letterhead and carried two typewritten sentences:

"We'll pay ten thousand dollars to keep our star from being cheapened. Take it or leave it."

"Say," said Tyrone. "Ten grand is chicken feed. I could clean up a million showing that thing at stag parties, and I called them up and told them so."

"Why don't you go after that million, then?" asked Datchett.

"Because, a couple of days later, when the three of us were talking it over at my place--"

"The three of you?" repeated the detective. "When did these others get in on it?"

"Minna was in from the first. She's my wife, you know. Joe came along about the time I made Nonpareil the offer."

"Yes. I figured Ray needed a strong man's help," contributed Beard, and smiled at Minna Gordon.

"Anyway," Tyrone resumed, "I got a phone call. It was from Nonpareil, or said it was. They weren't going to pay my price. They told me to send the thing to the studios, or a bunch of torpedoes would give me a bellyful of lead."

"Sure it was Nonpareil?" suggested Datchett.

"Not dead sure, but almost. It might be Holgar's manager, or a close friend. Or just a crank. Or somebody else trying to get possession of it. Whoever it was meant business."

"And that's why you're here?" prompted Datchett.

"Yes. We lammed away as far as we could, figuring to lay low till a lawyer or somebody could make a real deal for the pictures. But they traced us and followed us. They found we took this apartment a couple of days ago. About an hour back the phone rang and I answered it." His lips twitched. "They don't intend to pay off, or even spare us if we turn the film over. Their trouble bums said that they'd call here tonight and rub me out."

"Why not call the cops?" suggested Datchett.

"And lose the film, maybe? We hope to stick it out this night and get gone in the morning. Now, Mr.--Datchett's your name, isn't it?--will you stay with the job?" He picked up the money from the table and offered it.

"Okay," said Datchett. "It's the boss' idea, anyway."

He took the money and counted it again.

"Careful, ain't you?" snickered Beard.

Datchett gave him a sleety look. "Very," he said.

He looked around the big room. It was lighted by a floor lamp, comfortably furnished. The doorway to the hall was stout and had a good patent lock. Big windows opened onto an alley, with a fire escape climbing up to one of them from the ground three stories down. A smaller door opened onto a closet with a roll-away bed.

"I sleep there," said Beard.

Another door led to a small hallway, off of which opened a bathroom, a kitchenette and a bedroom. All of these rooms had windows but no fire escapes. Tyrone followed Datchett on his tour, talking. As they went into the kitchenette he came close to Datchett and spoke in a low, secretive voice.

"Stick by me," he said, "and there'll be some extra dough in it for you."

"Why isn't that husky lad Beard enough bodyguard?" Datchett asked.

"I don't really trust Beard. All he's interested in is half the take on the film."

Datchett did not reply. He started back to the front room. A nervous laugh sounded and he saw Minna Gordon and Beard step quickly apart.

They had been in each other's arms. Tyrone, behind, had not seen.

"Listen," Datchett addressed the three. "The only ways into this place are by the door, which can be locked, and by the window with the fire escape, which can be watched. If these movie guys, or whoever they are, have really put a bunch of guns on your trail, my advice is to stick here all night."

"That's what we figure on," said Beard.

They all sat down. Datchett took a seat next to the window where the fire escape was located. It was almost dark outside.

"How about a few cards?" invited Minna Gordon.

"You three can play," said Datchett. "I'm here to bodyguard. If there's any trouble, I want to be ready to get in at the start of it."

The blonde commenced shuffling the cards. Tyrone strolled over to Datchett and peered out of the window.

"Better get back into the room," Datchett told him. "A gun guy out there would be hard to see from up here, and he could pick you off like an apple from a tree."

"Just what I was thinking," replied Tyrone. "A man could practically climb up to this window before we knew he was there. I've got a suggestion."

"Such as what?"

"Listen," said Tyrone. "The only place to watch the window is from outside."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Suppose we keep the hall door locked and let nobody in or out. Then the only way in would be the window. And you, Datchett, would stay in the alley and have the difference on anybody who tried to come up from the fire escape."

"And you could shoot him where he was biggest, detective," added Beard, looking up from his cards. "If we could burn down some tough baby it might quiet this killing talk."

"I'll shoot when it's time," said Datchett. "There's merit in what you say, Tyrone." He got up, and Tyrone pulled down the white shade on the window. "I'm going down," Datchett went on. "Don't let anybody in or out unless you hear my voice."

He went out into the hall. Behind him he heard the lock snap.

He descended to the ground and went out a side door into the alley, crossed it and found an upturned barrel to sit on. He spotted the window of Apartment 3-G up above and watched it idly, fumbling for a cigarette. It wouldn't be tough to win his fee, though it would be boring, he reflected. Maybe this lardy little Tyrone was only imagining danger. Those phone calls might be a joke. But Datchett had the fifty dollars in his pocket. He'd do a night's sentry duty and help the trio catch a train in the morning.

He lolled and thought and smoked. Half a package of cigarettes later he saw the light in the apartment blink out. He rose quickly, feeling for the big gun in his armpit. But a moment later the light came on again. After a little while he saw a silhouette on the curtain, recognizable as Tyrone. The cameraman twitched the curtain back, raised the window and crawled out on the fire escape. He descended and, seeing Datchett in the gloom, came toward him.

"If you're really in danger," said Datchett, "you're an awful fool to take chances showing up against a lighted window."

"I wanted to get down here with you," replied Tyrone. "I feel safer. And I didn't want to go down through the apartment--there might be someone laying for me in the hall. So I just climbed out of the window."

"You're easier to kill outside than in," reminded Datchett.

"That's not true. The killer

would be heading for the apartment, not me. He wouldn't come out here to find me."

"How about Beard and your wife? Do they want to come down here?"

"They're trying to say they're not scared," said Tyrone. "Just now they said that they only half believe those phone calls."

"I only half believe them myself," said Datchett.

Tyrone looked at him sharply.

"Oh, all right, all right," conceded Datchett. "You've paid me and here I am at work. But don't you think the idea's a little batty yourself?"

"Say, Datchett," said Tyrone, "a big company like Nonpareil is full of tough birds who would as soon have you or me or anybody killed as think about it. And mind you, these Holgar pictures are plenty hot. A flash of them would make a fool out of her--ruin her as a star. Why wouldn't they be ready to kill to stop it?"

"You sound as if you were on their side."

"Not for a minute. But I get their idea. That's why I've fooled them this far along." Tyrone grinned proudly, then grew serious again. "Say, Datchett, what do you think of Joe Beard?"

"I don't know him well enough to think."

"Do you imagine," and Tyrone's voice was crafty, "that there's anything between him and Minna?"

Datchett looked at him without answering.

"Beard and she stepped out a lot before I married her," said Tyrone. "They worked in some pictures together and liked each other fine. When Beard muscled in on us--you've guessed that he did just that--I wondered if he didn't want something more than half the dough for that Holgar film. Maybe he's still going for Minna."

"I don't do that kind of detective work," grunted Datchett.

"I guess I'd better wait and be sure," said Tyrone. "I don't want to kick up a row. Not with Joe and Minna."

Datchett got up to stretch his legs. Tyrone perched on the barrel. "Say, detective," he said.

Datchett turned his back on the apartment house and faced the cameraman. "What?"

"How'd you like to throw in with me on peddling the film? It's worth big dough, I tell you. You could represent me to the Nonpareil people, while I lay low somewhere. If they couldn't find me they couldn't scare me. They'd have to come through, and plenty."

"Nothing doing," snorted Datchett. "What do you think I am?"

But Tyrone was suddenly looking aloft, at the lighted window both had stopped watching. His eyes and mouth opened wide. "Datchett!" he exclaimed. "Look there!"

Against the drawn shade two shadows wrestled back and forth. Even as Datchett whirled and looked, they fell apart. One, in the very center of the lighted curtain and looming large, was surely Joe Beard. His chest was heaving, his hands poised to attack or defend. Next moment the two figures grappled again. Datchett, transfixed, saw Beard's hands flail at his assailant, saw the other's arm fly back with a knife and then strike home. Beard staggered, slumped down. Even as Datchett charged the fire escape the lights went out.

"Datchett, Datchett!" Tyrone was hanging to the detective's elbow. "Don't leave me alone!"

Datchett handed him the gun. "Up the stairs through the house," he crisped. "Catch anyone who tries to come out that way."

Tyrone stared at the gun as if he had never seen one before. Then he scurried in at the side door. Datchett scrambled up the fire escape, gained the first landing, the second, almost fell up the third flight and was at the window.

All was dark inside. He jerked a flashlight from his hip pocket, held it ready in one hand. The sash was up, just as Tyrone had left it. Datchett reached in, grabbed the curtain by the bottom and jerked it quickly. As it flew up he stabbed the flash beam into the room. He circled the walls quickly, lit up each corner in turn, then quartered the floor with the finger of radiance. A still form lay on the rug. Datchett bounded in.

A moment later the door burst open. Tyrone was there. He fumbled for a switch and lighted a cluster of bulbs on the ceiling. "The door was unlocked," he panted. "Somebody got in or out."

In the center of the rug lay Joe Beard, arms and legs outflung, blank face upward. The hilt of a knife jutted from his chest and blood soaked the front of his coat. Under him lay the fallen floor lamp, its extension cord jerked from the socket.

Datchett knelt beside Beard, felt the damp fabric over his heart, then twitched the eyelids. "Dead," he pronounced.

"Dead?" echoed Tyrone. Then, as he looked around, "Where's Minna?"

More blood was spattered on the rug near Beard, spots of it leading like a trail toward the hall to the bathroom. Tyrone followed it, holding Datchett's gun ready. He found another switch, snapped it. The hall lighted up and so did the bathroom beyond. Tyrone exclaimed in alarm. Datchett hurried to him.

"It's Minna," said Tyrone. The blonde lay twisted on the tiled floor of the bathroom. Her nose trickled blood. As they bent over her she moaned and quivered. Datchett turned on a faucet, scooped handfuls of cold water into her face. She moaned again, jerked convulsively and looked up. She began to cry.

Tyrone raised her in his arms. Datchett took the gun from his limp hand and poked into bedroom, kitchenette and closet. Nobody was in any of them. He returned to the front room, studying the body of Beard closely.

Tyrone came back after him, helping Minna. Her nose was out of plumb and she trembled violently.

"Call the police," said Tyrone. "Let's catch the heels who did this."

"You ought to have called them before this happened," said Datchett. He picked up the phone and dialed a number. "Give me Captain Scaife, please," he told the man who answered. Then, after a moment, "Hello, Cap. Datchett. Listen, I've got something that might interest you. Are you busy?" He gave the street and apartment numbers. "No, no hurry. Half an hour or forty-five minutes from now will be soon enough. Coming up yourself? I'll be seeing you, copper."

He hung up the receiver.

"What do you mean, no hurry?" demanded Tyrone truculently.

"We want to look around before a lot of cops get in here and muddle things up," replied Datchett. "What about your film? Still got it?"

Tyrone pulled a suitcase from under the davenport and rummaged in it. "It's here," he reported.

Minna was sitting by a table. Datchett touched her nose carefully and she squealed in pain. "Not broken," announced Datchett. "It's swollen up like Jimmy Durante's schnozzle, but it'll be all right in a few days. Got any liquor, Tyrone? A shot would do her good."

Tyrone went to the kitchen and brought back a bottle. Minna drew the cork with her teeth and took a generous swig. It made her cheeks glow. "All right, what happened?" asked Datchett.

But Minna was looking at Beard for the first time since she had come from the bathroom. Her eyes grew round and she screamed. Next moment she flopped down beside the body. "Joe! Joe!" she called to it. She looked up wildly. "They

killed him!" she wailed.

Tyrone stared at her stonily. "Then it's true," he mumbled. "She and Joe were cheating on me."

"Sure it's true," Datchett snapped at him. "I saw them mauling each other. How have you missed it up to now?" He put out a hand and lifted Minna back to her chair. "Pull yourself together," he commanded her. "What happened?"

She goggled with dead eyes but finally spoke. "I was alone--in here," she said.

"In here? You mean, in this front room?"

"Yes. That is, I think so--my head isn't clear yet. Something hit me back of the ear and I went down. That's all."

"Went down on your face and bumped your nose?"

"She must have," interposed Tyrone, pointing to the stained rug. "There's the trail of blood that leads to the bath."

"There's a big plenty of it," said Datchett. "What was going on at that time, Minna? How about Beard?"

"Joe was in the back somewhere," said Minna. "In the bedroom or the bathroom. This--" She gestured at the body. "It hadn't happened yet."

"You don't remember a fight?" persisted Datchett.

"No. Only that crack I got on the head."

"How long was this after Tyrone got out of the window and came down to me?"

"I didn't know he did that," Minna said.

"Sure you don't," sneered Tyrone. "You weren't paying attention to anybody but Joe Beard."

Minna looked at Tyrone and half grimaced in scorn, then gasped with the pain of her sore facial muscles.

"Settle your fuss some other time," said Datchett. "You don't recall creeping into the bathroom, Minna?"

"No, nor coming out. I woke up in here."

"Must have been her subconscious mind," volunteered Tyrone again, forgetting his grievance of a moment ago. "The killer must have knocked her down and then, when the fight with Joe started, she still had the idea of getting away. She crawled as far as she could."

"One thing more," Datchett said to Minna. "Was the door locked?"

"Seems as if it was."

Datchett looked at the open window, at the position of Beard's body, then across at the door. "He must have sneaked up the fire escape while Tyrone and I were talking," he hazarded. "Then he tore out the door after killing Beard." He stooped above the corpse, examining the position of the fallen floor lamp under it.

"Hey!" he exclaimed suddenly. "There's something screwy about this."

"Eh?" said Tyrone.

Datchett pointed. "See where Beard's feet are? They mark the very spot where he must have been standing. He's lying on his back, with the lamp pinned under him. But if he knocked it down, its foot would be close to his feet. It would have been standing close to him, see? But the lamp's foot is pointing the opposite direction, beyond his head and to one side. It must have been standing a good eight feet away. When Beard fell he couldn't have landed anywhere near it, let alone pull it down under him."

He turned to look sharply at Tyrone, then at Minna. She was still groggy. "Better take another drink," he said to her.

She nodded, took the bottle from the table beside her and swigged at it again. He liquor seemed to snap her out of the last of her daze.

"I've got it," said Tyrone suddenly. "The lamp was knocked over before Beard was stabbed."

But Datchett shook his head. "No. If you'll remember, the light went out just as Beard went down. And the ceiling lights weren't on." He seemed to notice for the first time that he held his gun in his hand. He laid it carefully on the table beside Minna's bottle, then knelt to pick up the detached plug at the end of the lamp cord. "See this? It was lying in the middle of the rug, nowhere near any socket from which it might pull. That means the lamp was planted where it was, not just knocked loose." He faced the two again. "This thing was framed," he said, "and one of you framed it."

Minna swore a single startled oath. Tyrone shook his head incredulously.

"Where is the lamp socket?" was Datchett's next demand.

"I don't know," said Minna.

Tyrone looked around the room, then pointed. "Over there, I think, under the fringe of the rug next the wall."

Datchett went and scraped the rug back with his foot. "No socket here," he announced. "Somebody's trying to lie out of this."

"Put up your hands, Datchett," commanded Tyrone sharply.

The detective looked around. Tyrone had taken the gun from the table and was levelling it.

"Easy, Datchett, or you'll get every slug in this gun." Tyrone yanked the suitcase from under the davenport again and began backing toward the door. "I'm getting out. You were smart enough to see I did the killing, but you're not smart enough to figure how or to keep me from getting away. The socket's really over on this side of the room. Look at it when I'm gone and follow what you find there. You'll learn something new in the murder line."

Datchett took a quick step toward him.

"I'll kill you!" warned Tyrone. "Might as well kill two as--"

Datchett rushed and the cameraman pulled the trigger. A dead click sounded, then Datchett had him. Tyrone tried to club with the gun, but Datchett twisted it from his hand. Then he struck Tyrone's puffy jowl with his fist, knocking him down. Datchett grabbed his collar and yanked him to his feet, then hurled him into a chair.

"Going to tell how you killed Beard?" gritted the detective.

Tyrone tried to get up, but Datchett shoved him back and struck him a blow on the mouth. "Going to tell?" he repeated, and struck again. Blood came, and Minna screamed. Once more Datchett drew back his fist.

"I'll come clean," choked Tyrone. "I knew Beard was making a play for Minna. I didn't let on, but I wasn't going to share her, or the dough from the film, either. So I framed this whole thing. The ten grand offer from Nonpareil was on the up and up, and then I made up the story about the phone calls. Beard and Minna didn't scare easy, but I talked them into coming out here. I figured to do to job as far from Hollywood as possible. It would give me time to work into the clear while cops were following bum leads back to California.

"As soon as you went downstairs a while ago I got my chance to jump Beard in the bathroom and stick a knife into him. Then I came back in here, sneaked up behind Minna and batted her down. After dragging Beard in I saw he'd left smears of blood, so I took Minna into the bathroom and bloodied her nose to make it look right."

"You fat slob!" Minna spat. "No wonder I couldn't remember being in there."

"Now about those shadows on the blind?" questioned Datchett. "Were they movie stuff or something?"

"Just that," nodded Tyrone. "I'd taken pictures of Beard at work, and one of them, a knife fight in

silhouette in front of a lighted screen, gave me the whole idea. I fetched that chunk of film along. After I'd finished with Beard and Minna and unlocked the door to give the fake murderer an out, I rigged up a little portable projector we brought along. I needed the room dark for the picture and afterward, so I knocked over the lamp and laid it under Joe. Then I connected the projector to the socket with the cord under the rug. There was only a moment when the place was dark, then the blind was lighted up like a screen. I hid the projector behind the davenport cushions yonder. The light was blank white for a little while--I'd timed it for that, to give me a chance to get away--before the fight stuff showed up. When it was through running, the projector light went off automatically."

Datchett pulled aside the davenport cushions and revealed the projector. "And I was to be your alibi witness?" he smiled. "Cheap at fifty bucks."

Tyrone rubbed his battered face. "How did you catch on?" he asked querulously.

"Several ways. You were so scared at first, then you came outside without a tremble. I told you then I only half believed you. Then, when I went up the fire escape and you busted in and said the door was unlocked, I wondered again. You see, I'd made that climb in close to record time, and it was hard to figure how a killer could find and unlock a door in a dark, unknown apartment in time to get away. And you were less scared than ever, didn't even lock the door, though the killer was supposed to be just gone and maybe coming back. As for the blood on the rug, there was too much of it for Minna's nose to shed. And finally that lamp, tipped over by a falling body that couldn't have dropped anywhere within reach of it.

"That was enough to argue that it was a frameup, and it might be either Minna, who could have given herself a sock for an alibi, or you. I tried a test. First I got another drink into Minna to give her strength to make a break. I put my gun--unloading it first without either of you noticing--and putting it where Minna or you could reach it. Then I began making the spot so hot that the guilty party would get panicky and come into the open."

"You aren't as bright as you think you are," snarled Tyrone. "You might have strung along with me and picked up several grand. As it is, you get nothing."

Datchett smiled. "Not as bad as that. You've paid my fee. And I'm also going to take over this suitcase of yours, with the Holgar sun-bath film. According to that letter you showed me, Nonpareil will pay a reasonable cash reward for it."

A knock sounded at the door. Datchett opened it.

"Come in, Captain Scaife," he said. "Your job's all done for you."

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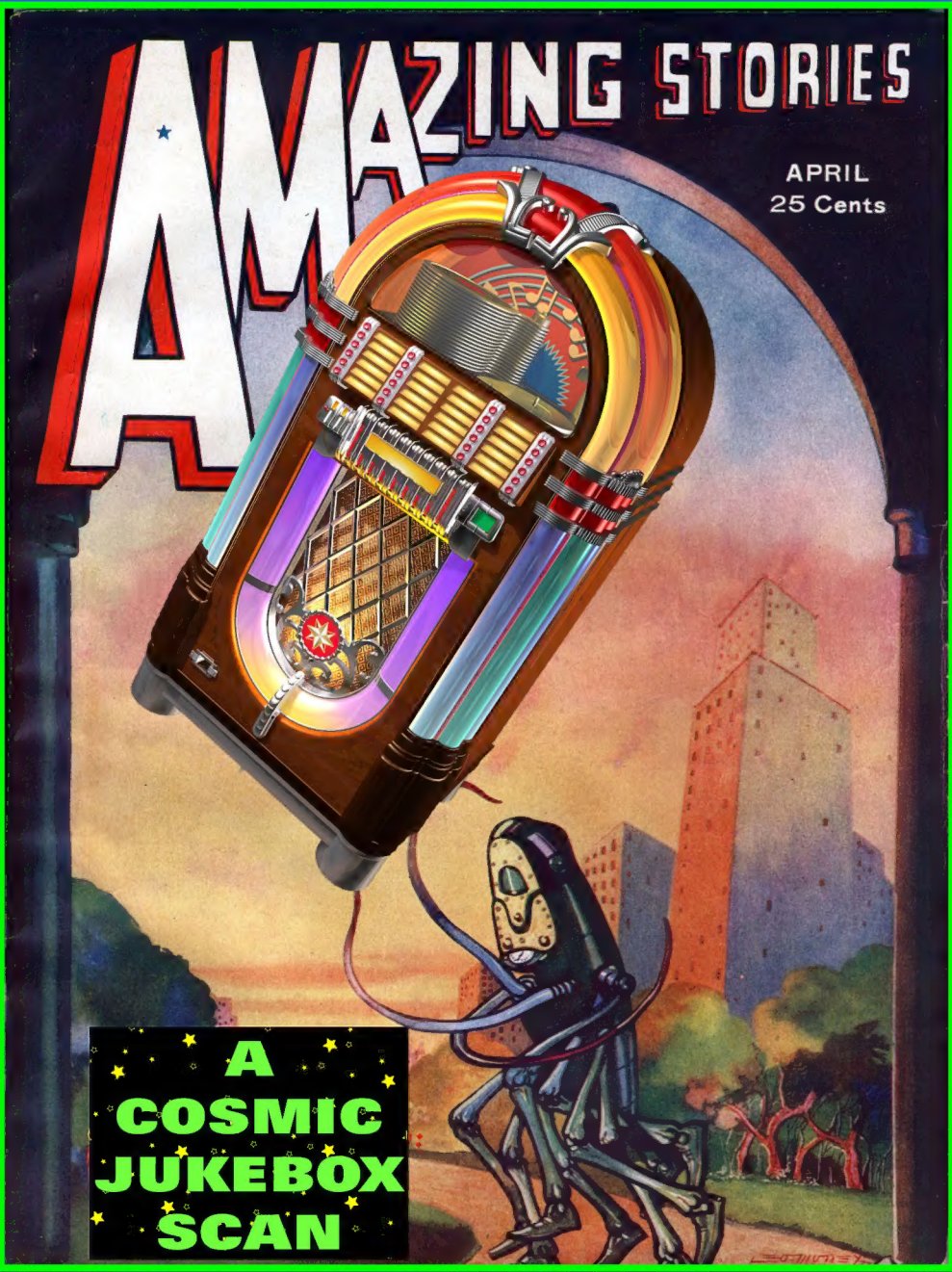
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